READLY EXCLUSIVE

car

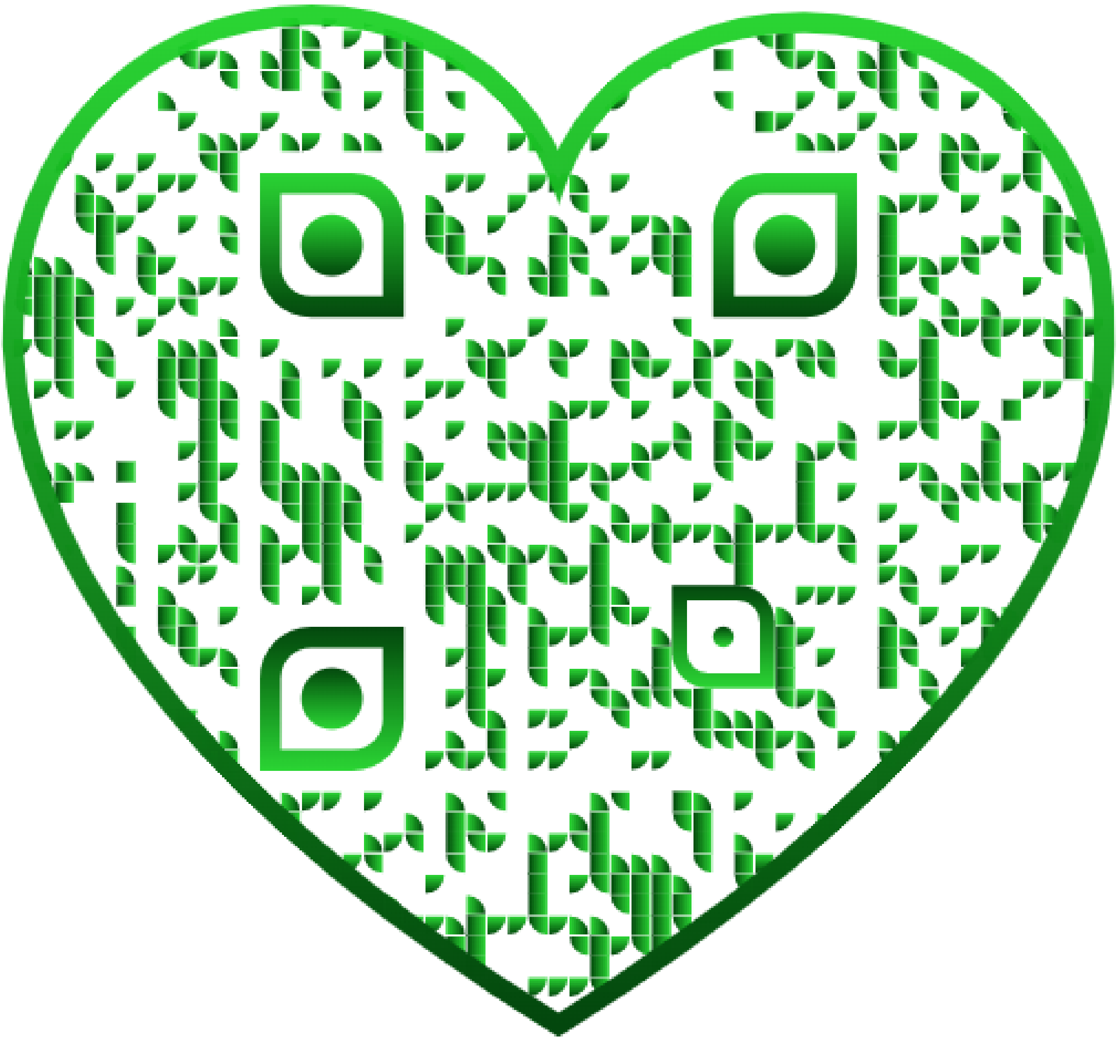
car MAGAZINE SUPERCAR SPECIAL

ITALY'S BEST SUPERCARS

ON THE ROAD IN ALL-TIME GREATS FROM THE HOME OF THE SUPERCAR

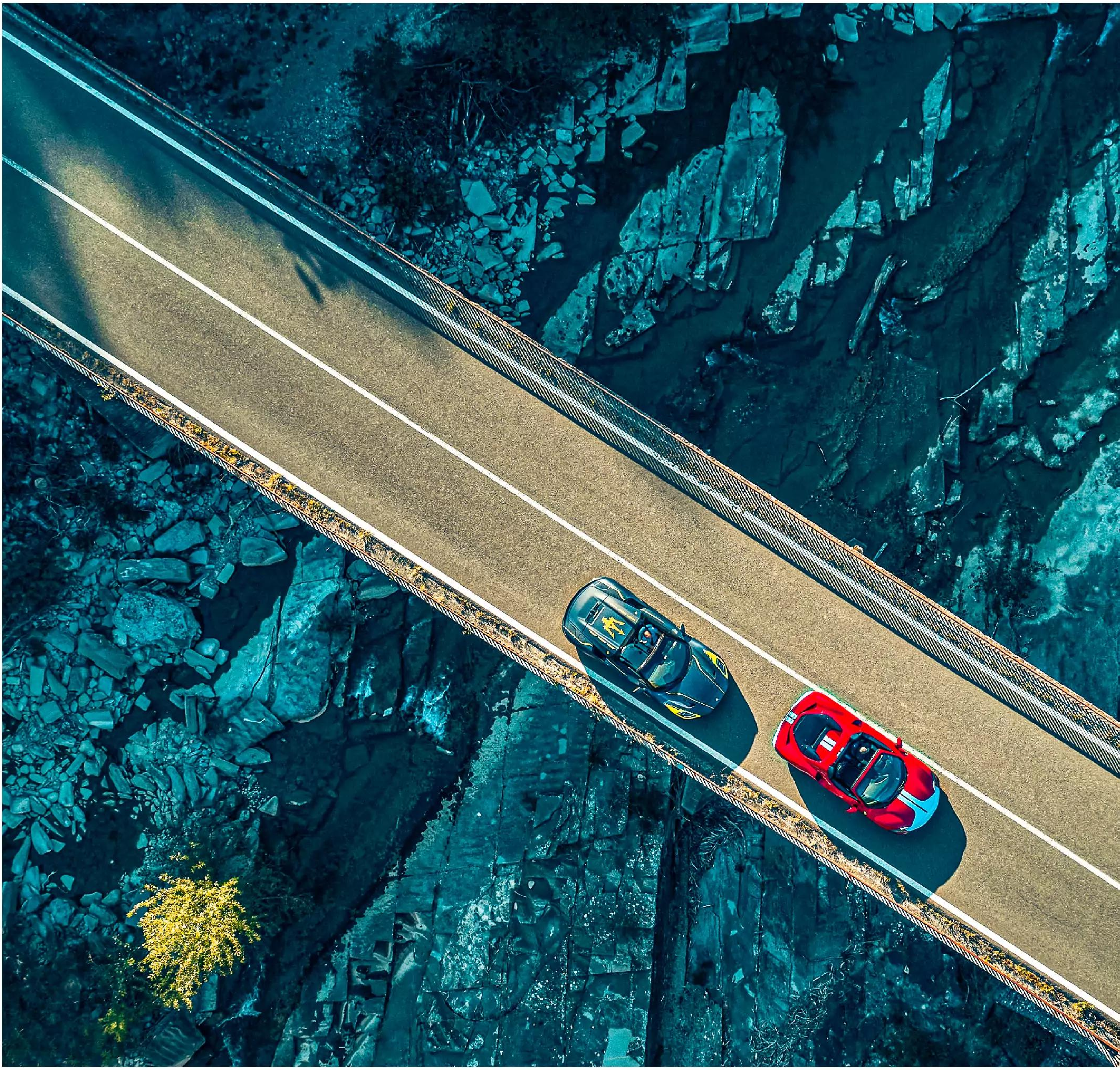
STARRING:

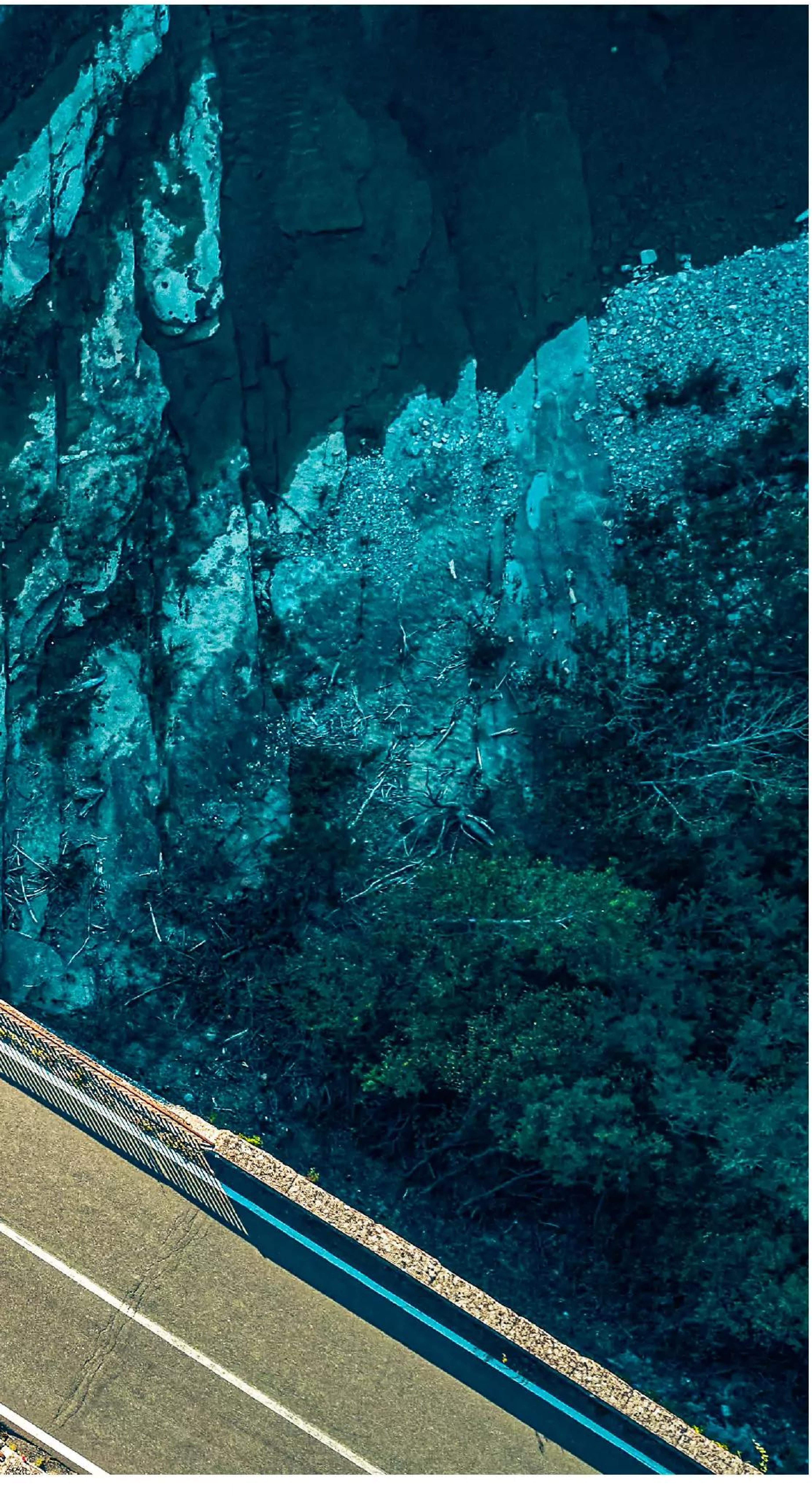
- FERRARI
- MASERATI
- PAGANI
- LAMBORGHINI



car

SUPERCAR SPECIAL #1 | EXCLUSIVE TO READLY





In this collection:

4 Ferrari 812 Superfast meets Lamborghini Aventador SVJ

14 On and off the road in Lamborghini's Sterrato

22 Ferrari 812 GTS battling the elements... and winning

30 Our epic two-part return to the Sahara in a game-changing Ferrari

52 Pagani's limited-edition Codalunga driven

62 Maserati MC20 Cielo meets Ferrari's 296 GTS

Published by Bauer Media, Media House,
Lynch Wood, Peterborough PE2 6EA

TEL 01733 468000

EMAIL CAR@carmagazine.co.uk

SUBSCRIBE www.greatmagazines.co.uk/car

H BAUER PUBLISHING Media House, Lynch Wood, Peterborough PE2 6EA

© All material published remains the copyright of H Bauer Publishing. No part of this magazine may be reproduced in whole or in part without the written permission of the publisher. *CAR* can't accept responsibility for unsolicited material

COMPLAINTS H Bauer Publishing is a member of the Independent Press Standards Organisation (www.ipso.co.uk) and endeavours to respond to and resolve concerns quickly. Our Editorial Complaints Policy (including full details of how to contact us about editorial complaints and IPSO's contact details) can be found at www.bauermediacomplaints.co.uk. **FINANCIAL REGULATION** H Bauer Publishing is authorised and regulated by the FCA (ref no 845898).

THE

LOST WORLD

Naturally aspirated V12s don't have much time left before they're wiped off the face of the planet. Ferrari's 812 Superfast and Lamborghini's Aventador SVJ aren't giving up without a fight

Words Georg Kacher **Photography** Tom Salt

Ferrari cabin is light, roomy and comfortable after the Lambo's

THIS IS IT. This is the most exciting drive possible. Nothing can match this, or so I decide after an insane 20-minute stint in the Lamborghini Aventador SVJ. And then something does match it: the Ferrari 812 Superfast. Although in many ways very different, the Ferrari is every bit as demanding and rewarding as the Lamborghini. Both leave me sweating and exhilarated, excited and energised, but also saddened. Because cars like this won't be around for much longer.

It's never been common, and of late the 12-cylinder engine has been a rarity in any shape or form. Scarcest of them all is the naturally aspirated kind, designed to tick all the performance-related boxes and stir emotions to their roots. While a supercharged or twin-turbo V8 can come close in terms of output and torque, the free-breathing 12 circles its own planet as far as throttle response, midrange pick-up and a fearless redline are concerned. It partly trades refinement for raucousness, linearity for eruption, manners for raw performance.

The flipside of that rawness is that any naturally aspirated 12-cylinder road car will struggle to meet emissions regulations and will fall well short of the fuel economy that smaller-capacity turbocharged and hybrid engines can offer. As a breed the unforced-induction V12 may be doomed, but it's not going quietly. We went to Emilia-Romagna, home turf for both Ferrari and Lamborghini, to drive the two key survivors, the 812 Superfast and the Aventador SVJ, tackling climbs, descents and corners aplenty to see what it is they can do that nothing else can match.

The SVJ is a limited-edition version of the mid-engined, all-wheel-drive Aventador, with various changes including new cylinder heads and a lighter flywheel. The 812 Superfast is the improved-all-round replacement for the front-engined, rear-wheel-drive F12.

Numerically, they're close together. The 65° block of the Ferrari displaces 6496cc, while the Lamborghini's 60° V12 is just 2cc larger. Both offer peak power at 8500rpm: 789bhp in the case of the 812, 759 for the Aventador SVJ; credit should go to the Ferrari's freer flowing intake and exhaust systems. They're closer on torque: 530lb ft vs 531. Dry weight is an identical 1525kg.

Their on-paper performance is fag-paper close too: the 812 Superfast will do 0-62mph in 2.9 seconds, hits double that speed in 7.9sec, and then peaks at 211mph, while the Aventador SVJ takes just 2.8 seconds to 62 and 8.6 to 125mph, and has a top speed of 219mph. ▶

Worrying about how you'll find the £90k extra for the Lambo? Don't waste your time – the SVJ's sold out

BOTH ARE LOUD, THIRSTY, DRAMATIC AND THRILLING AT SPEED, BUT THEY'RE QUITE DIFFERENT IN CHARACTER

Heading for a museum some time soon: V12 unencumbered by forced induction

When the SVJ hits 125mph, the aero reconfigures itself

The numbers may be close, and both cars may be loud, thirsty, dramatic and utterly thrilling at speed, but the duo are quite different in character. What sets the two beasts apart more than anything else is the vastly different packaging. All but the slenderest of drivers will find the SVJ tricky to get into and out of, and once inside they'll find unwelcoming sports seats, a narrow pedal box, poor headroom and atrocious visibility. Overhead traffic lights are invariably out of sight, the huge rear-three-quarter blind spot is a potentially very expensive game of chance, stalks and knees are forever colliding, and the mix of Audi and Lamborghini details still doesn't look right seven years after the Aventador's launch.

In contrast to the Lamborghini, the Ferrari is almost a luxury suite. The seats come in three sizes, legroom is a relief, visibility could hardly be better, and it takes no time to master the *manettino* drive-mode selector, which lets you tweak the car's manners with aplomb.

That said, the Ferrari's front end is long enough to drop out of sight in dense fog, the secondary controls are fiddly and the turning circle is massive. Let's keep it all in perspective: these are not comfortable, spacious cars if you're driving all day, and they're not luggage-friendly. Driven in full attack mode, they'll both hammer your teeth, tattoo your palms and crack some spinal discs.

Firing them up emphasises their differences. In the SVJ, your index finger lifts the red cage door that protects the hell-breaks-loose button. In the 812, the red start-stop activator sits just a thumb stretch away on the busy steering wheel. The Ferrari engine responds with vigour to the starter button, boosts idle speed for a few seconds then settles down. The Lamborghini V12 initially sounds like it's struggling to remember its firing order before it's prepared for screaming and shivering action. Still searching for the right rhythm, the idle speed eventually manifests itself, noisily clearing its many throats.

The throttle response of the Lambo feels like it can trigger thunder and lightning simultaneously. So you'd better think ▶

THE BIG QUESTIONS LAMBORGHINI AVENTADOR SVJ

Intuitive infotainment? It's an elderly Audi system but it feels cutting-edge in comparison with the Ferrari's. The SVJ's hardware is a generation behind the A6 and A7's but it does have Apple CarPlay and Android Auto. Or delete the lot to save a few kg.

I like weekends away in fast cars Then fly somewhere cool and rent one. That way you'll be able to take some luggage with you and you won't be googling for an osteopath the minute you arrive. The Lambo's front boot is comparable to a 911's; the mpg isn't.

Is the engine in the right place? It's behind the seats, meaning it's so in the right place there's a home-sweet-home plaque cross-stitched out of carbonfibre on the underside of the engine cover. Well, there should be. Handling, noise: it's win all the way.

If the engine was an actual work of art it'd be... Something emotionally stimulating with a good chance of hurting you: the 167-metre fissure in the Tate Modern's floor nicknamed 'Doris' crack' (but actually called Shibboleth) that snared 15 people.

Aero trickery is much subtler on Ferrari, but it's active too

ON FAST ROADS THEY ZIGZAG THROUGH TRAFFIC LIKE INVINCIBLE ALIEN OBJECTS GUIDED FROM A DISTANT STAR

twice before deactivating the stability control, because all it takes to get you out of line is a puddle or two, some soggy leaves or an unforeseen imperfection in the road. All-wheel drive is a help, but the torque split clearly favours the rear wheels. On slow and winding turf, critical handling attitudes include snap oversteer and snap understeer. It's feisty.

High above Pistoia, in the heart of wild boar country, the two cars display remarkably different road manners. In extremis, the Ferrari is quick to switch from nose-heavy to tail-happy. On the same roads at the same speeds, the Lamborghini is equally hard work but feels a touch faster to turn, thanks to the all-wheel-drive system. While its driven front wheels help to momentarily pull the car out of trouble and straighten up a ragged line, the system adds weight, numbs the steering when entering slow corners too fast, and hampers manoeuvrability.

The 812 Superfast is emphatically rear-wheel drive, even on a straight road, in the dry, with the throttle not fully depressed. While the transaxle layout results in a perfectly balanced weight distribution, there is at all times enough grunt on tap to alert the e-diff and summon stability control. With the electronic aids off, the Ferrari is prone to spinning in tricky conditions.

The 812 encourages its driver to push deeper and deeper into tight bends, to corner with awesome lateral acceleration, to stimulate the driving wheels with generous boosts of torque, and to use steering and throttle to massage the delicate cornering balance. In second gear, the Ferrari willingly lights impromptu bonfires close to the apex. In fourth, short straights are inhaled as a whole without pausing for breath. In Race, full-throttle upshifts almost hurt. The brakes are simply sensational in terms of modularity, performance and repeatability.

On the autostrada, the Aventador is a road shark par excellence. Its brakes respond with the finality of a light switch. The heavy yet super-direct steering works with micrometric precision. At speed the dampers assume the lowest position and tautest calibration. ▶

THE BIG QUESTIONS FERRARI 812 SUPERFAST

Intuitive infotainment? Not so much. An engineering degree and/or 20 minutes of fiddling required to get your head around it. Even then the sat-nav has a mischievous streak a mile wide: 'Straight through rush-hour Brussels, you say? Why not?'

I like weekends away in fast cars Boot space is vestigial given the size of the car but it'll take your modest Gucci overnight bag. The cool-but-fiddly harnesses – if optioned – will make you hot and bothered long before you even get into your hotel room.

Is the engine in the right place? Not if you're a racecar engineer, yes if you aren't. Front-engined layout can fool gullible people into thinking it's a soft GT but that impression won't survive their first minute actually driving the thing. It's much more hardcore than that.

If the engine was an actual work of art it'd be... The Bayeux Tapestry. Like that embroidered tour de force the 812's power delivery is shot through with historical significance, goes on forever and is one in the eye for those who dare oppose it.

SVJ isn't just about big stickers: engine and aero are tweaked, wheels are new

Italian tilers and road-roller drivers are agreed…

… Georg's scarf is hilarious

It was a brand new housing estate before this foundation-rattling duo rumbled into town

The ALA active-aero system can either increase the downforce or reduce the drag resistance above 125mph, and the split ground-effect system directs airflow to the wheels that need it most, via a set of invisible motorised flaps.

While the Ferrari softens its dampers at a finger's split-second command, the most extreme Aventador bottoms out even in Strada mode until the chassis-control warning light comes on. The SVJ feels more at home on the racetrack than the Ferrari, while the 812 is much better than the Lambo on narrow and/or badly surfaced minor roads. Both are at their best on fast roads, where they zigzag through traffic like invincible alien objects guided from a distant star.

What about the all-wheel steering fitted as standard on both supercars? It's impossible to detect the transition from synchro-steer to counter-steer, so there's certainly no harmful effect on either car's dynamics.

How anti-social are they really? They're certainly both thirsty, the Lamborghini in particular. And they're not only noisy, but both have extra popping and banging engineered-in. In some circumstances the noise is a virtue, part of a piece with the looks. People love the whole spectacle. Sorry, *some* people love the whole spectacle. In our three days in these cars on these roads, we saw jaws drop, barking dogs leaping excitedly into the air and traffic cops egging us on, ZZ Top-style. The teenage crazies on their scooters would do anything to snatch a picture, rejoicing with thumbs up and high-fives. In working-class Italy – where hoarse diesels and breathless three-cylinder minis rule the roads – the two loud supercars are received with enthusiasm and national pride, not envy and admonitory finger-swagging.

On the open road, however, we feel less like heroes; too many other drivers would really rather not move over to let us have our fun. It's safer to escape to the country, where traffic tends to be light and corners outnumber straights 99 to one.

Choosing between these two remarkable V12s is as subjective as favouring red wine over white. The Lamborghini engine marks the ultimate evolution of a legend which is almost as old as the brand. The Ferrari is powered by a more advanced and more economical engine, but as soon as revs soar it is every bit as explosive. Logic says these cars are way too fast for normal traffic, too radical for normal roads, too challenging for normal owners, too vulnerable to qualify as daily drivers. But Lord knows we'll miss them when they're gone. **car**

LAMBORGHINI AVENTADOR SVJ

PRICE £350,000
ENGINE 6496cc 48v V12, 759bhp @ 8500rpm, 531lb ft @ 6750rpm
TRANSMISSION Seven-speed sequential, all-wheel drive
PERFORMANCe 2.8sec 0-62mph, 218mph, 15.8mpg, 486g/km CO2
WEIGHT 1625kg (est)

FERRARI 812 SUPERFAST

PRICE £263,033
ENGINE 6498cc 48v V12, 789bhp @ 8500rpm, 530lb ft @ 7000rpm
TRANSMISSION Seven-speed dual-clutch auto, rear-wheel drive
PERFORMANCE 2.9sec 0-62mph, 219mph, 19.0mpg, 340g/km CO2
WEIGHT 1630kg

THIS STORY ORIGINALLY APPEARED IN THE **MARCH 2019 ISSUE OF *CAR***

DONE AND

DUSTED

End of the Huracan… and the beginning of a fresh strain of glorious madness from Lamborghini

Words Ben Barry **Photography** Charlie Magee

Wider track means carbon wheelarch extensions

Actual adventure ahoy

STRADA
SPORT
RALLY

Options list includes roof rack

This has all the hallmarks of an accident. I've accelerated hard down a straight at Chuckwalla Valley Raceway in the Lamborghini Huracan Sterrato, but rather than braking hard for the following left-hand turn, I've missed the apex completely and find myself bounding off track into Californian desert.

Dust whips up like a sandstorm in my mirrors, threatening to envelop me the second I get stuck axles-deep in sand. But the Sterrato – literally 'dirt road' in Italian – isn't fazed. Neither is co-driver/instructor Giacomo Barri. 'In! Accelerate! Go!' he shouts over the V10.

To be fair, much has been done to ensure I'm neither having an accident nor getting stuck. The Sterrato's suspension is raised 44mm, the tracks widened 30mm front and 34mm rear then shrouded in chunky carbonfibre arches, and its belly gets a little extra protection courtesy of an aluminium front undertray, beefier side sills and tougher rear diffuser.

There are even 19-inch Bridgestone Dueler tyres a bit like an Ineos Grenadier's, plus a compass and inclinometer infotainment graphics and a new Rally mode to replace the usual Corsa race setting – it tweaks things like the powertrain, torque vectoring by braking and damping so you can slide about on the loose stuff. It's a Huracan splitting the difference between an Audi Allroad and Ariel Nomad. Closer to home? Sant'Agata's answer to the Porsche 911 Dakar.

Now, you could argue that I'm merely a journalist whooping and bashing my way over desert scrub in someone else's very expensive supercar (guilty), but also more problematically for Lamborghini, you might think the Sterrato completely pointless. That was my instinct when I first saw it.

But in creating a Lamborghini that can make like a Safari rally car, Lamborghini has created something far more relevant – an all-wheel-drive supercar arguably better suited to the vast majority of drivers.

The market seems to agree – the initial run of 1063 was increased to 1499 units, all of which are now sold out, with the £232,820 base price typically bumped £40k-£50k with options that include our car's graphics and spotlights. The fact that this is officially the final Huracan *and* the last non-hybrid Lamborghini won't have hurt demand either.

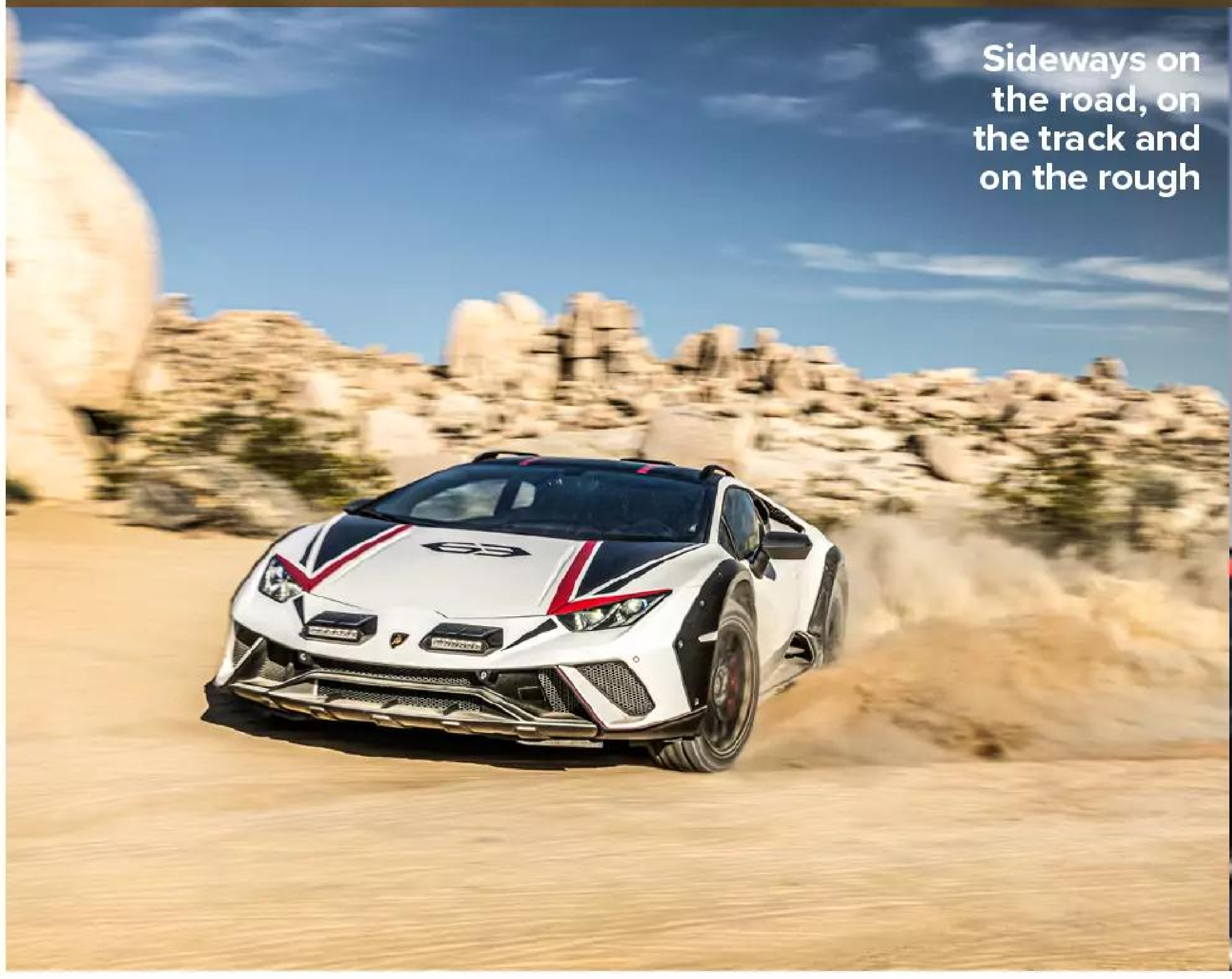
The Sterrato back story is pleasingly spontaneous, if it's true. Apparently it was born from testing the then-new Urus on a sandy rally stage at the Nardo proving ground. Design boss Mitja Borkert says he dropped in to experience how the high-performance SUV drove, had a ball, then over dinner talk turned to how much fun a Huracan might be on the same ▶

IT'S AN ALL-WHEEL-DRIVE SUPERCAR BETTER SUITED TO MOST DRIVERS

Why stop at the kerb? Sterrato handles any line you take

Still a Huracan inside, just one that's slightly higher up

Underbody protection fully functional, and fully funky


Sideways on the road, on the track and on the rough

CHUCKWALLA
VALLEY
RACEWAY

Titanium rollcage signals serious intent

> **THE STEERING WHEEL SLIPS THROUGH MY HANDS WITH A HULA-HOOP FLUIDITY**

stage. Eureka. 'I called my guys immediately that night, and the next day I said we need to start sketching,' enthuses Borkert.

The design team produced a one-third scale model in an Alitalia livery redolent of the Lancia Stratos rally car; the engineering department requisitioned an old Huracan Performante durability hack to build a prototype and began having a riotous old time.

Four laps in and I'm starting to find my rhythm at Chuckwalla. The tyres cut into the loose surface with surprising efficacy, so I can brake later and find more traction than I guessed, and there's a blissful mid-engined balance as I flick left and right through more technical sandy sections.

Perhaps most striking is how controlled the body feels, even when the wheels are being battered about remorselessly and take a few especially wince-inducing hits – I initially tense up fearing ever-amplifying deflections and the mother of all tank-slappers, but instead the rebound damping smooths it all over and the steering wheel slips through my hands with a kind of hula-hoop fluidity, the normal bite of asphalt replaced by the intuitive dance of managing weight transfer. I loosen my grip, guiding and feeling the car, relaxing into its languid movements.

All the while there's that V10 engine behind, its 8600rpm stretch providing almost endless options to adjust the balance, whether it's three sharp blips to tip the nose into a turn and tweak the attitude, or a long progressive squeeze to settle it into the fast stuff as I click from second to – *blam!* – third gear. God that feels good.

Performance of 602bhp and 413lb ft matches the entry-level Evo RWD, while the weight edges up 48kg over an Evo AWD at 1470kg dry. The engine is actually the V10 in its top-spec STO trim, titanium valves and all, but the roof snorkel reduces the power output; it was deemed necessary after conventional side-mounted air intakes kept clogging with dirt during testing.

Issues? My helmeted head bashes repeatedly on the Huracan's low-flying cant rail; the suspension hardware isn't actually strengthened; and the Sterrato sticks with carbon-ceramic brakes, because that's what the rest of the Huracan range uses, but they're hugely expensive to replace and not really suited to the grainy abrasion inherent in off-road use. New technical boss Rouven Mohr admits there could be issues if you repeatedly venture into the dunes but counters that 'our surface treatment is very durable'.

Given it works so well off-road, the Huracan Sterrato is surprisingly effective on track. 'The idea wasn't to make the Huracan an off-road car – it was to preserve as much of the supercar feeling on asphalt but transfer this idea to low-grip surfaces,' explains Mohr.

His team experimented with ride height increases in 5mm increments before hitting on 44mm as the sweet spot, then reduced spring stiffness by 25 per cent. Rather than stiffening the anti-roll bars – which is normal on a compact high-performance SUV – Mohr's team then chose to actively allow pitching and rolling. The adaptive dampers even soften a little under braking – especially in Rally mode – to encourage more weight transfer.

'It gives freedom to really put more load on the front axle, to help the car bite and turn for really precise behaviour,' says ▶

WHAT NEXT FOR STERRATO?

Could Urus be next for the Sterrato treatment? Design boss Mitja Borkert admits Lamborghini has looked into it but 'couldn't do everything'. Here's us, then, making it easier in six simple verb-first steps...

1 Add tougher bolt-on wheelarches to shroud the wider track and generally look more purposeful

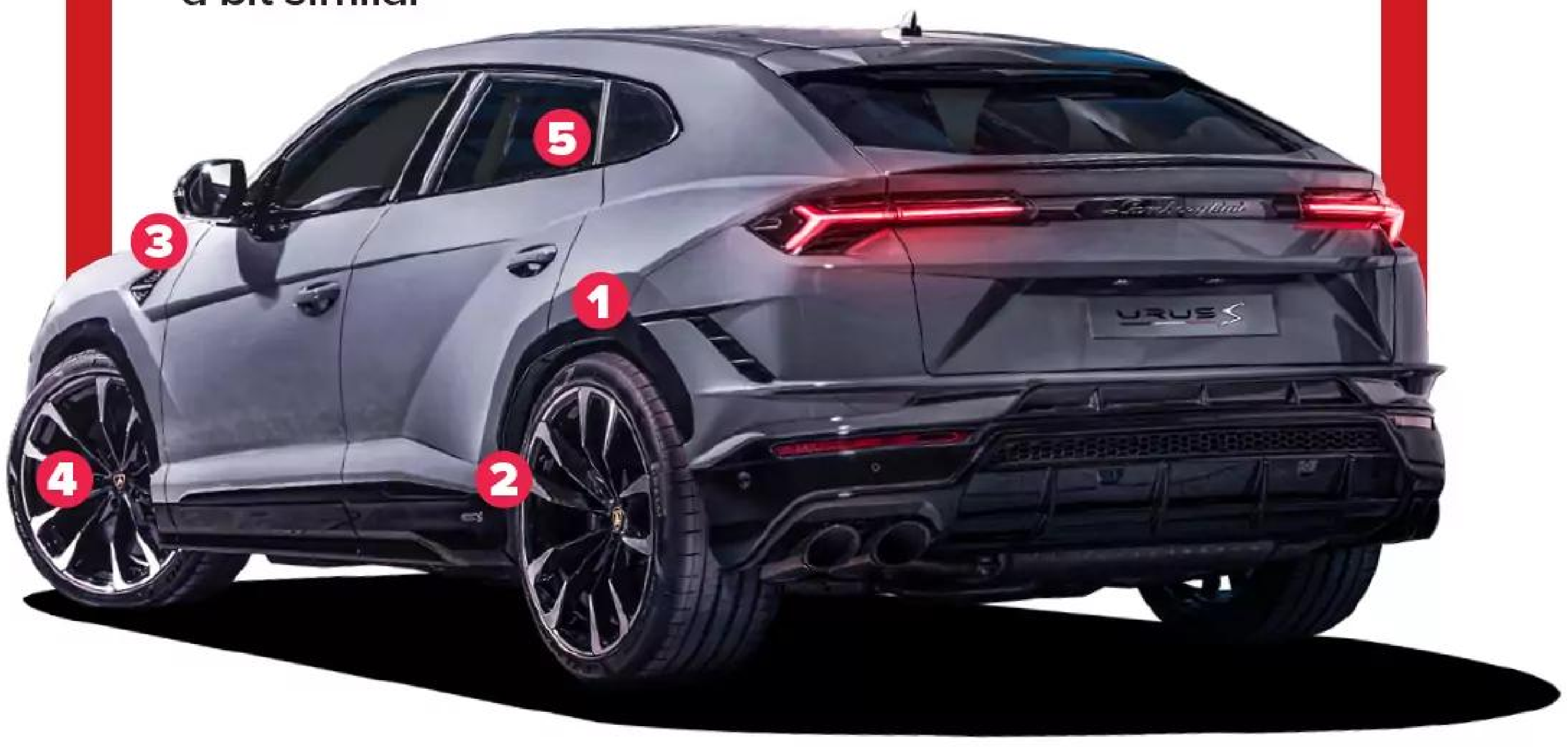
2 Raise and soften off the suspension for more on-road comfort and better off-road ability

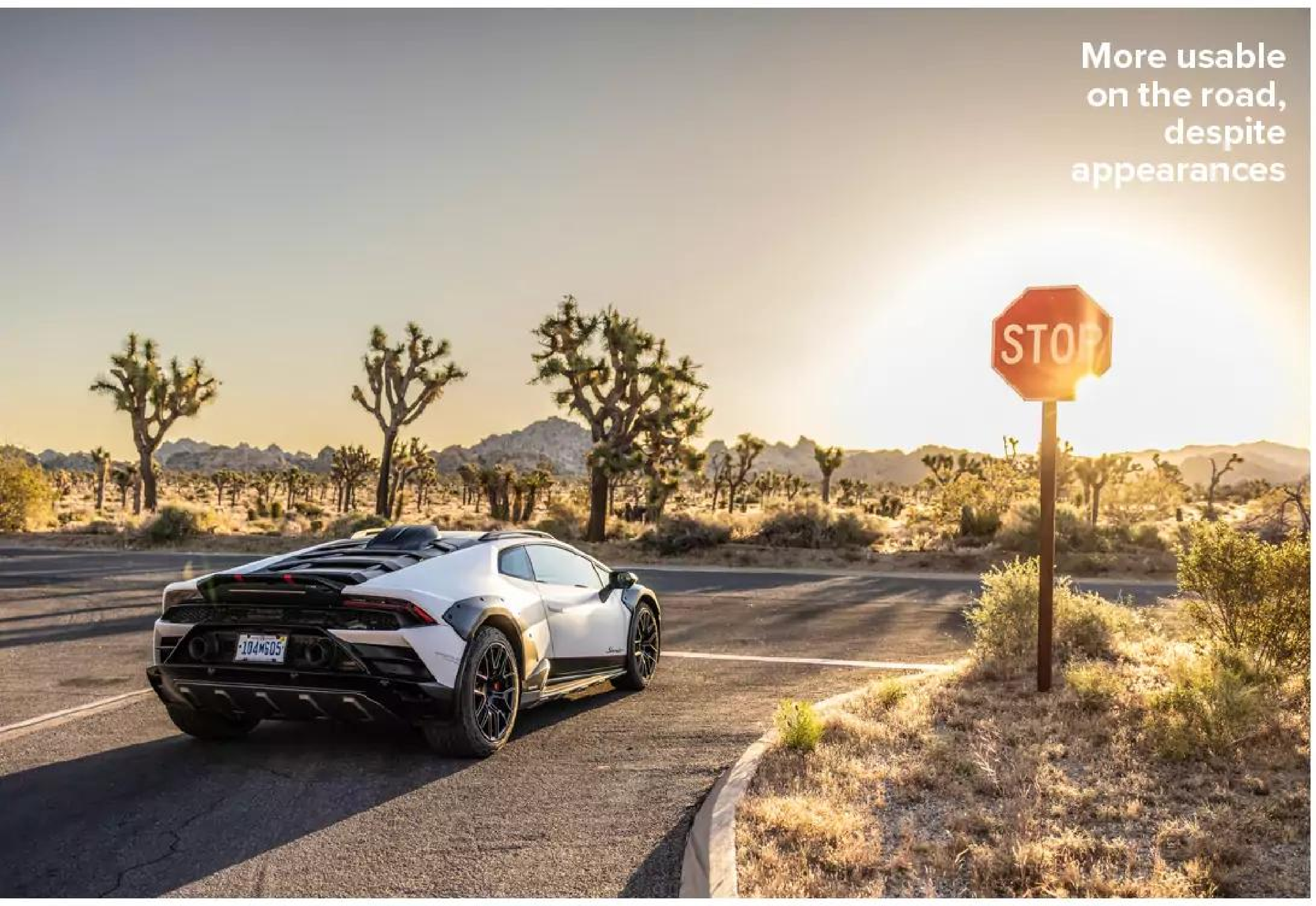
3 Offer a graphics pack and rally-style spotlights

4 Fit slightly smaller wheels wrapped in chunky Bridgestone Dueler rubber

5 Treat the interior to an alcantara makeover, then add more off-roady graphics and Rally drive mode

6 Enter the Dakar Rally in something that looks a bit similar





More usable on the road, despite appearances

Mohr. The wider track, meanwhile, helps calm lateral weight transfer during direction changes. Did they bring in rally people from the old VW Polo WRC programme? 'No, but some people on the team have rally experience,' says Mohr.

The tyres are the final link in the chain and clearly radically different from any other Dueler rubber, no matter the shared name. 'We needed a tyre that could survive some laps on track, find traction on gravel but still have quite a high stiffness of the rubber blocks for precision,' says Mohr.

'It had to look sexy too – some of the profile blocks on the side are not needed for function and could destroy some precision,' he admits.

The big trade is top speed, with the Sterrato's limited to 162mph, way down from the usual 200mph-plus. It's the slowest current Lamborghini flat-out.

> **IT'S MUCH SLOWER, OF COURSE, BUT IT'S A LOAD OF FUN TO TOSS ABOUT**

If you drive a Sterrato like a regular Huracan on track, you'll be going off-road even when you don't want to. But I'm impressed how well it copes with the part of our test loop that involves the actual Chuckwalla circuit. There's more bodyroll and the limits are lower than with a regular Huracan, as you'd expect, so it's very mobile. But the inevitable slides are progressive and intuitive to manage and it soaks up kerb-bashing too. It's much slower, of course, but it's a load of fun to toss about.

Particularly surprising is how alert the steering still feels as I flick the Sterrato through a slalom – there's clearly some reduction in ultimate precision, but it remains punchy and the chassis does a solid job of not unravelling when jinked side-to-side. No mushy indecision here.

But it's when I venture out of Chuckwalla and into Joshua Tree National Park that it really clicks. I take Highway 10 west, then north up Pinto Basin Road. Sun sears down, 20-foot-high boulders lie like giant walnut husks at the roadside and heat haze knocks the definition from the mountain ranges in the distance. The landscape is bleached monotone and starkly inhospitable yet beautifully dreamy all at the same time.

Driving the Sterrato here reveals a mellower character over other Huracans. The ride is highly compliant, it steers very nicely and somehow even road noise is well suppressed given the Bridgestone's chunky tread blocks – the noise only gets amplified over really coarse sections.

This is not the full Alpine A110 treatment, but it's a step in that direction; a more usable sort of GT bent so you don't need to crawl quite as hesitatingly over speed bumps or tiptoe into faster compressions or worry about dropping a wheel off the road if you want to pull into a gravel layby. So, yes, RWD, Tecnica or STO will be more incisive, but I'd probably use a Sterrato more often.

Only the carbon-ceramic brakes jar, because they're over-sensitive for those little comfort dabs at the pedal when you're on an unfamiliar road. Perhaps another reason conventional stoppers would've been a better fit.

Of course mellow is a relative term when it comes to Lamborghini, so don't go thinking all the fun's been knocked out of it – the steering that impressed on track still feels alert, it hooks and settles into corners even when you lean on it quite hard in the tighter Sport damping mode and the V10 remains as vital and tuneful as ever with its slurpy induction sucks, a mournful midrange on throttle/percussive thunderclaps off it, and the all-consuming fire of its top end. (Insiders note a slight difference in sound; I can't tell.)

The caveat is that while our road route gives us a good flavour of the Sterrato's dynamics, it isn't the best chance to really dig into them as you might on a British B-road or European mountain pass – crushingly low speed limits, tourists and police all hinder that. But I'm confident to say it feels good enough in most driving to be highly entertaining.

After a couple of hours of enjoying Joshua Tree, we drop the Sterrato off in Palm Springs with its gridded street layout and single-storey Art Moderne homes built in the Sonoran desert. It's both an hour or so and a million miles from the dust and the dirt of Chuckwalla, but the Lamborghini feels equally at home and reinforces the feeling that far from being pointless, this is a surprisingly rounded supercar.

The rally stuff is a bit of red herring, kind of like an Aventador SVJ's Nürburgring lap time – it's a showcase of what the Sterrato can do, but it's not representative of what most owners *will* do. But in this case, developing the Huracan for such an extreme purpose actually makes it more fit for purpose on the road.

The Sterrato represents an unexpected plot-twist in the Huracan's final days, but a very welcome one all the same. **car**

Noisier? Not really, to the delight of your neighbours

THIS STORY ORIGINALLY APPEARED IN THE **JULY 2023 ISSUE OF *CAR***

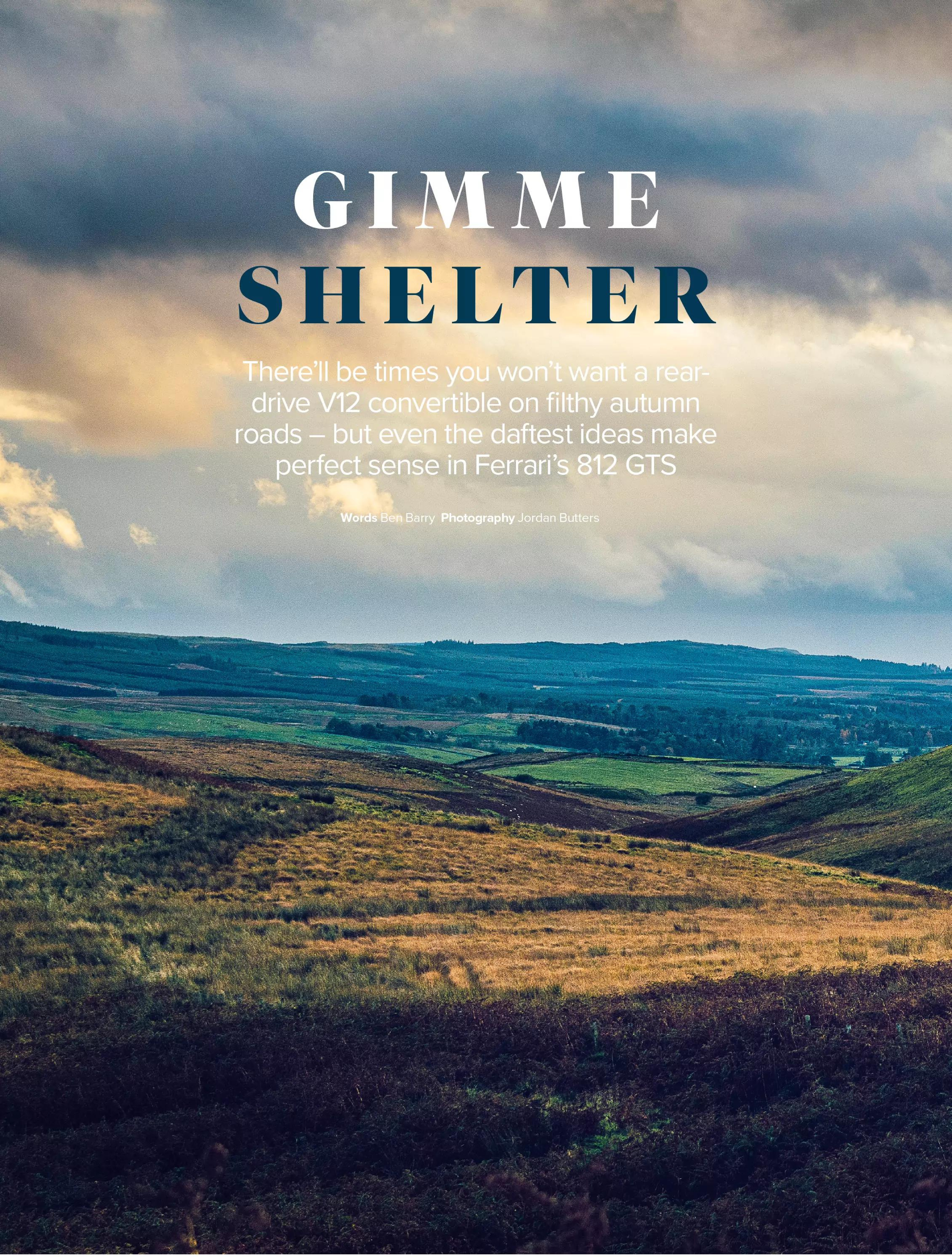
LAMBORGHINI HURACAN STERRATO

PRICE £232,820
POWERTRAIN 5204cc 40v V10, seven-speed automated manual, all-wheel drive
PERFORMANCE 602bhp @ 8000rpm, 413lb ft @ 6500rpm, 3.4sec 0-62mph, 162mph
EFFICIENCY 19.0mpg, 337g/km CO2
WEIGHT 1470kg (dry)
★★★★★

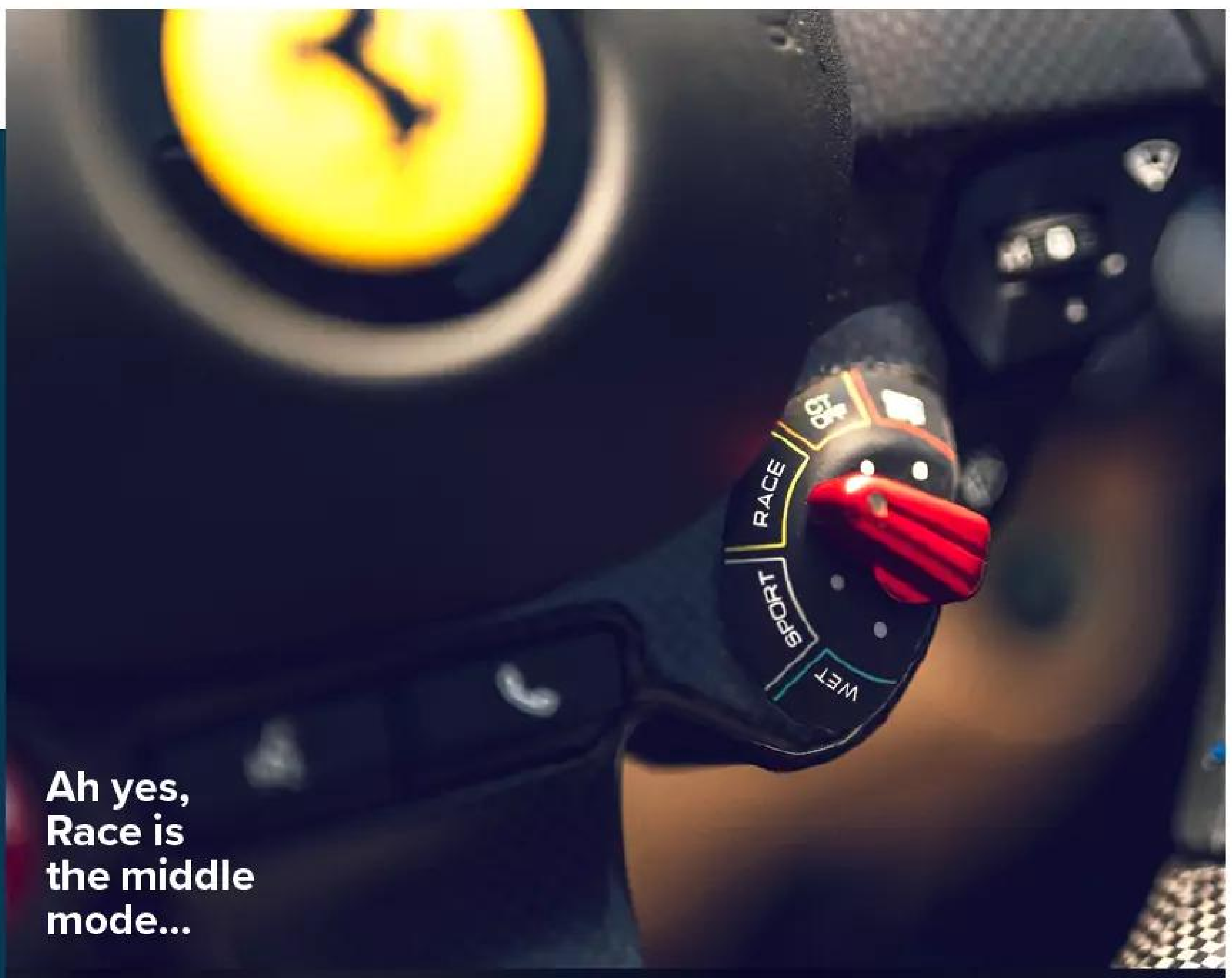
GIMME SHELTER

There'll be times you won't want a rear-drive V12 convertible on filthy autumn roads – but even the daftest ideas make perfect sense in Ferrari's 812 GTS

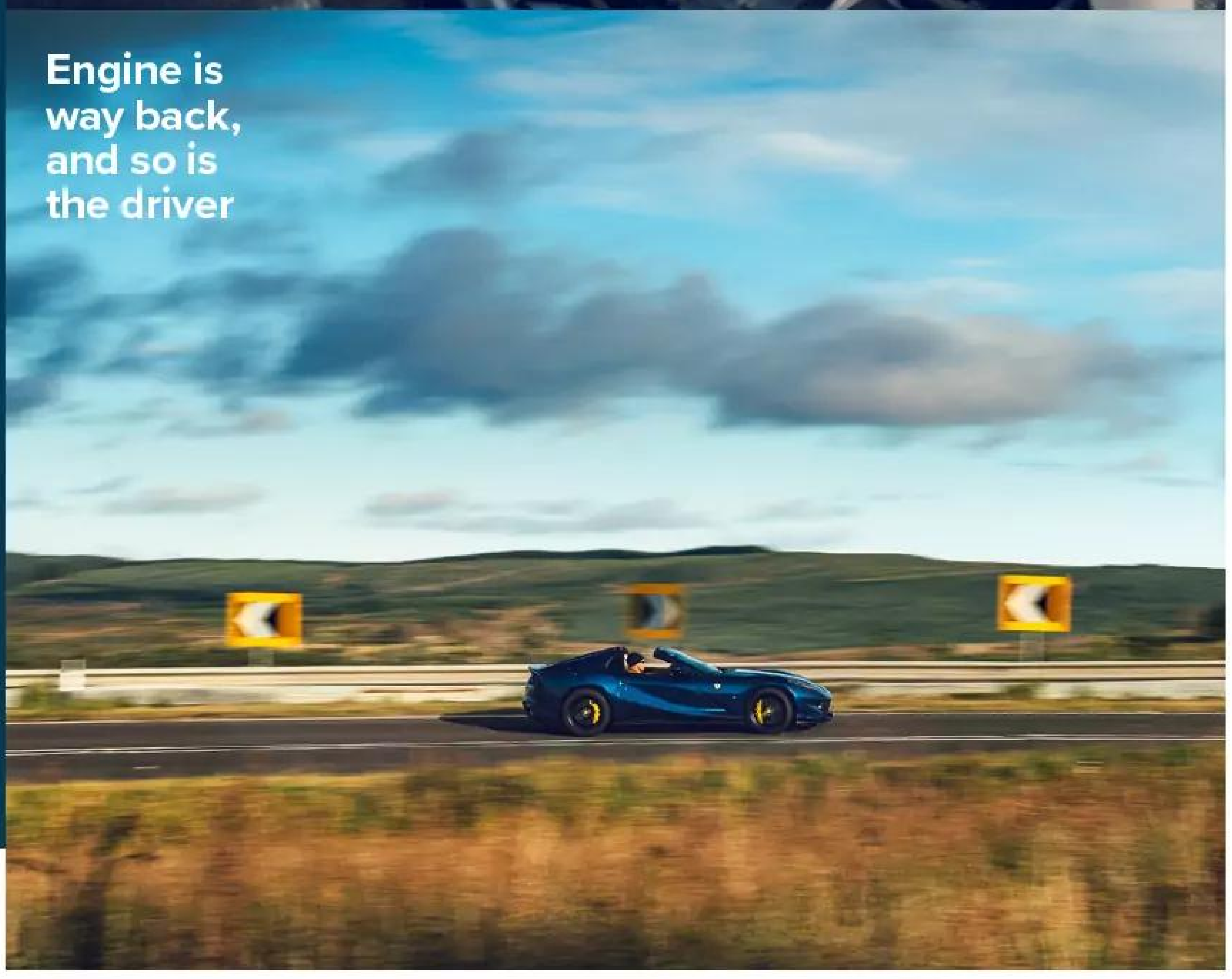
Words Ben Barry **Photography** Jordan Butters



V12 FNE



Ah yes, Race is the middle mode...



Engine is way back, and so is the driver

I watched the compelling, if incredibly sad, documentary *Challenger: the Final Flight* on Netflix recently, where the key revelation is (spoiler alert) that the engineers knew the rocket-booster O-rings might fail but gave the go-ahead for the launch, causing NASA's space shuttle (this bit you know) to transform into a kind of 9/11 at 46,000ft.

This cataclysmic disaster springs to mind as I squeeze the Ferrari 812 GTS's throttle pedal to the floor in third gear on a slightly damp Scottish road. Said pedal controls Ferrari's most powerful ever series-production 12-cylinder motor, a 6.5-litre version of the F140 unit conceived originally for the 2002 Enzo, and whose performance is bettered only by the hybrid-boosted LaFerrari hypercar, and limited Monza SP1 and SP2 models that squeeze out 10bhp more.

Compared with the 730bhp F12, the 812's predecessor, Ferrari has introduced a longer stroke plus 350 bar direct injection, revised control of variable-geometry inlet tracts, a compression ratio upped just a fraction to 13.6:1 and a shrieky, non-turbocharged 8900rpm peak engine speed, far above rivals from Aston and Bentley that serve up less performance for less graft. Oh, and Ferrari has shortened the seven-speed dual-clutch gearbox's ratios six per cent so you can fast-forward to the good bits even quicker.

All this equates to 789bhp, 0-124mph in 8.3 seconds, a soundtrack that'd have the Philharmonic downing tools, and a large side order of intimidation when you squeeze that drilled throttle pedal to its stop.

I'm in Race mode, meaning the GTS's responses are all tensed, with the caveat that the stability control's responses are now more 101 than 999, and I'm clenching everything like a power lifter going for a personal best. The 9000rpm on the tacho doesn't seem so far away as the throttle responds instantly and the needle ticks up from 3500rpm, at which point 80 per cent of the 530lb ft torque is already churning at the rear tyres, the remainder not served until 7000rpm.

Power and torque swell immediately, if without the sledgehammer of a turbo. Four thousand, four and a half… by now the GTS is pulling hard, the exhaust note starting to transition from burbling bass to shriller brass with a power curve that feels much like a (successful) space launch looks. Keep it pinned and shift lights at the crown of the steering wheel start to illuminate. Five thousand and we're really shifting, five and a…. suddenly the tyres – huge 315-section 20-inch Pirelli P Zeros with an unusually plump 35 sidewall and no shortage of traction – can take no more in these sub-optimal conditions. The revs flick up as the tyres spin and I quickly stab in 5° of steering lock to stop the 812 looking at a field. *G-aaah!* My heart continues to pound even as the revs stabilise. Suddenly 9000rpm seems tantalisingly out of reach. But what a powertrain. What a machine.

The 812 Superfast on which the 812 GTS is based is a familiar recipe. It replaced the F12 as Ferrari's flagship V12 a few years ago, but the GTS adds a folding hardtop, making this the first series-production front-engined V12 since the 365 GTS4 (aka Daytona Spider) of 1969, though there have been closely related special editions.

The roof's a nifty device, rotating through 180° before ▶

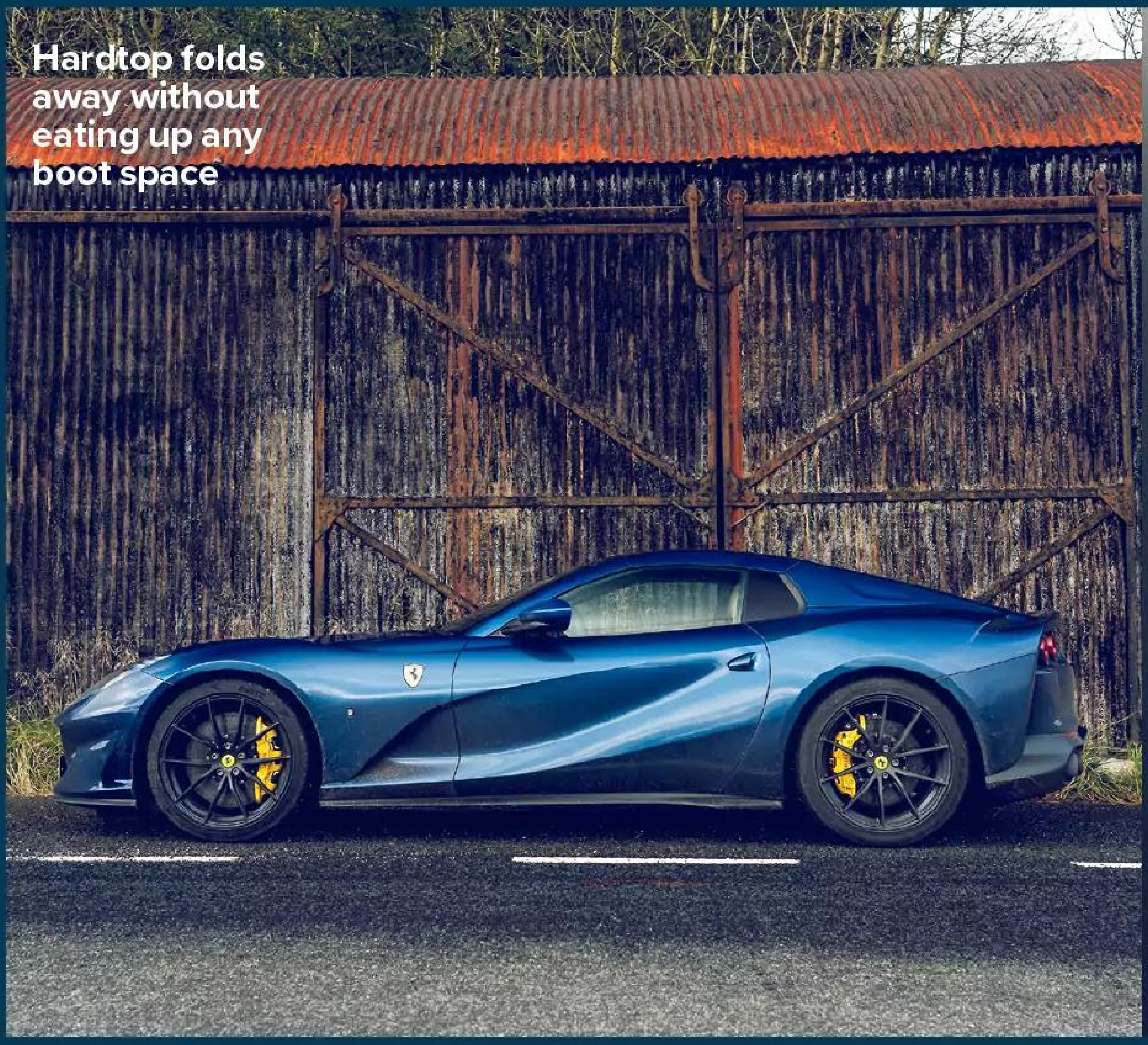
I'm in Race mode, clenching everything like a power lifter going for a personal best

Remarkably nimble for a front-engined V12, helped by rear steer

If you're getting wet, you're not going fast enough. (He's not getting wet)

Like Ben, the GTS is dreaming of Tuscany in July

When the throttle, gearshift, brakes steering and tarmac gel: magic



Hardtop folds away without eating up any boot space

RACE
7°C
Vehicle dynamics
F1-Trac
E-Diff
F1-DC
ESC
4WS
SCM
0
1/2
1
mph
0
km/h
0

Lots of tech, all of it adjustable, none of it intrusive

Autumn in the Borders? Ours, all ours

disappearing quietly under the tonneau cover in 14 seconds. Structural bracing adds 120kg, but the roof's neatly integrated into the design, with attractive rear buttresses flowing into a re-designed rear deck, and a profile that barely changes roof up or down because the difference is basically a small chunk of roof in the middle, a bit like a targa top. The diffuser at the lower rear of the 812 is modified to aerodynamically compensate for bodywork changes.

The new hardtop includes, behind the seats, a vertical pane of glass that can drop for an invigorating blast of fresh air and V12 music, even with the roof up. I'm under orders to leave the hardtop stowed at all times, drive to Scotland and then stay in some kind of glamping set-up. So I pack my sleeping bag in the boot (same 210 litres with the roof up or down) and point the 812 GTS over back roads that lead to the northbound A1. The driving position is friendly enough to just jump in and go, the trim more racy-focused than GT-luxurious, and the interior just as spacious as the coupe, but my 6ft 1in would do better with a seat that went a little further back and dropped lower.

At a lightest of 1645kg without fluids, the 812 GTS weighs over 200kg less than Aston's DBS Superlegerra Volante rival, but it's still no featherweight. Two things, though: 1) the V12 is pushed so far back behind the front axle it looks to have had a very tidy shunt, and a transaxle shifts weight further rearwards still, so 53 per cent of the car's weight is distributed to the rear, and much of the bulk kept within the wheelbase; and 2), it has four-wheel steering and Ferrari's long established quick steering. The GTS is unusually nimble for a car of this layout and size: it pivots around your hips even though you're basically driving a Top Fuel dragster, and you drive with the most economical of inputs, like guiding a sniffer dog on wheels.

You drive the 812 with the most economical of inputs, like guiding a sniffer dog on wheels

Trapped at 55mph behind overtaking lorries on the A1, the 812 GTS proves it can stretch its skill set for long-distance manners, but equally you won't mistake it for a lazy cruiser – it's a hardcore bit of kit that knows how to rein it in when required.

The cockpit remains a bubble of calm, apparently helped by two L-shaped flaps on the upper corners of the windscreen frame, but the ride has a gnarlier edge than Ferrari's mid-engined V8s and the DBS, in both Sport and Race settings, though Bumpy Road mode softens brittle edges while retaining perfect control. There's a similarly big step in powertrain settings between Sport and Race .

The air's chill but the sun's toasting damp off the road surface when I cut off the A1 and work across the wide open expanses of Northumberland National Park, gliding through the fast curves of the A68 before it crests at the Scottish border and flows down into a tangle of tighter turns. Framed by armco, double white lines down the centre, it's like scenic Scalextric.

I'm not full of confidence initially: the mid-weighted electric steering is super-accurate but can't rival a McLaren for communication, and the whole car feels a bit over-sensitive on these still-quick turns where I just want to lay into them with more generalised movements. But trust builds with experience, and the initially soft brake pedal wakes up to provide huge stopping power, the front end locks on to your chosen lines, and those rear tyres actually do a damn good job of transferring such extravagant power to the road.

By the time darkness falls, I'm beginning to feel more comfortable working the GTS harder, if still pondering whether I'd trade some agility for a calmer kind of feel on fast roads like this – as well as whether I actually want to disengage all safety systems to discover how this chassis really behaves. There's definitely more of an edge ▶

THOSE V12 SPECIAL EDITIONS

1948

166MM

Two-seat Touring-bodied roadster with a 2.0-litre V12 took its initials from the Mille Miglia, which it went on to win in 1949, as well as Le Mans.

1969

365 GTS4

Also known as the Daytona Spider, this was Ferrari's last series-production convertible with a front-mounted V12 before the 812 GTS.

2000

550 Barchetta Pininfarina

Ferrari removed the 550's roof to celebrate collaborator Pininfarina's 70th birthday. Very much your glamping kind of fabric roof.

2005

Superamerica

575M with an electrochromic glass folding hardtop that has switchable opacity when closed. Hey presto, best of coupe and convertible worlds.

2010

SA Aperta

Just 80 of these open 599s produced, celebrating Pininfarina's 80th anniversary. 'SA' is for Sergio and Andrea Pininfarina.

2014

F60 America

F12-based F60 America built to celebrate Ferrari's 60th anniversary in America. Wasn't just a roof chop, either – nose, wings and doors were restyled.

It's powerful and expensive, so treat it with respect... but not too much

to these dynamics than Ferrari's mid-engined models.

Glamping in October is, it transpires, just as cold as regular camping. I certainly can't remember having a freezing face in bed before. But there are no qualms about the views: we leave before dawn, wrapped up, roof down, gazing at a sky like black velvet littered with jewels on the edge of this Dark Sky Park.

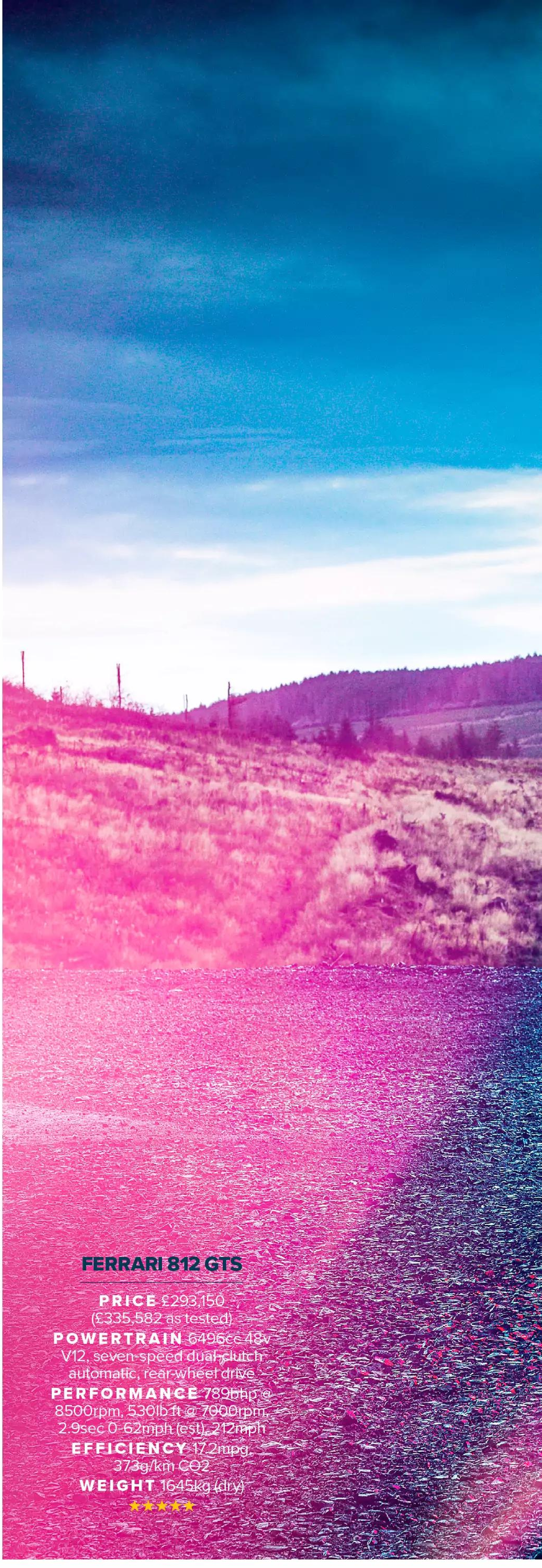
There's more undulation and tighter twists and turns to these roads, so you don't need quite so much commitment to really dig in to this extraordinary chassis. What you do need is tyre temperature. There's a graphic to the right of the 812's steering wheel that shows when the Pirellis are warmed, and in the cold and damp it takes an age for the tyres to go 'green', the fronts first as I work the steering hard, the rears later as I'm being a bit throttle shy. Then bingo, four green tyres, more grip, virtuous circle.

It's actually startling to feel out just how much mechanical grip the 812 can muster with ESC off, even in these conditions. Push through that grip with a bung of steering and squirt of throttle and it immediately wants to bite and straighten, almost like the stability control isn't entirely disabled, and certainly with far more aggression than an F8 – clearly the four-wheel steering feeds in here, but apparently the new electric steering also adds subtle torque hints to help a driver correct slides. The GTS responds better to big sends than tentative squirts past its limits. I've never driven a car that wants to straighten quite so aggressively, and together with yelps from the V12 this feels as close to lion-taming as you'll get on four wheels.

But breaching its limits helps me fully trust the 812 GTS. It's grippy, unbelievably agile, and so easy for throttle, gearshifts, brakes and steering to gel into a fast and smooth tempo, even if I never quite shake the lurking apprehension that this near-800bhp rear-drive weapon is a very senior piece of machinery.

With the sun warming the sky, I squeeze that V12 past 5500rpm, unleashing a hedonistic rush of noise and speed as the needle breaches 8500rpm with the sound distilled into a fierce single-note howl. Modern turbocharged engines are marvellous things, but the response, linearity, sound and sheer bandwidth delivered here are all reminders of what we've lost in the march of progress – and Ferrari assures us the naturally-aspirated V12 is here for the long term, even if it is hybridised. Amen to that.

The 812 GTS might be a familiar enough kind of concept, but no one else – not Aston, certainly not Bentley – gives an open-topped V12 GT such searing aggression. Think of the Ferrari 812 GTS more as a supercar that breaks with convention than a sporting GT and you'll have some idea what to expect when you flatten that throttle on a damp road. **car**



FERRARI 812 GTS

PRICE £293,150 (£335,582 as tested)

POWERTRAIN 6496cc 48v V12, seven-speed dual-clutch automatic, rear-wheel drive

PERFORMANCE 789bhp @ 8500rpm, 530lb ft @ 7000rpm, 2.9sec 0-62mph (est), 212mph

EFFICIENCY 17.2mpg, 373g/km CO2

WEIGHT 1645kg (dry)

★★★★★

This feels as close to lion taming as you'll get on four wheels

THIS STORY ORIGINALLY APPEARED IN THE **DECEMBER 2020 ISSUE OF *CAR***

GL·379EP

In 1995 *CAR* drove a Ferrari 512M from Maranello to the sands of the Sahara. The story redefined adventure drives and inspired a generation. Now, in Ferrari's V12 Purosangue, it's time to go back

WHY?

BECAUSE IT'S STILL THERE

FERRARI TO THE SAHARA: PART 1

Words Ben Miller **Photography** Olgun Kordal

For hours we've crushed distance with speed, watching in reverential silence as vast landscapes – widescreen valleys between sky-scraping escarpments – slid inexorably from windscreen to windows to rear-view mirror. As coarse tarmac rushed beneath warm Michelins and the V12 cantered just off idle for hour after hour, the effect was hypnotic. There was no traffic; no other life, even. Nothing to break the spell of this elemental place.

Then, perhaps 20 minutes ago, the road turned and made straight for one of those escarpments. It then began to climb, soaring from scrub-flecked valley to cloudless sky in stacked coils of curves. Now the engine is awake. Now the spell is broken. We've traded lazy revs and barely-there inputs for 8000rpm and great sweeps of the throttle pedal, a savage sonic barrage and racing-shift-lights testament to the 6.5-litre V12's reach and potency.

What's more, the rest of the Ferrari's powertrain – an eight-speed twin-clutcher with shifts like a GT3 car's and dexterous, apparently unimpeachable four-wheel drive – is offering no real counter-argument to this hedonism. A gearlever, three pedals and just the one driven axle to manage? For better or for worse the Purosangue cares not for such impediments to speed. The contrast in effort, on the car's part and mine, between now and just a few moments ago is, like the Ferrari's crimson paint against the scree, stark.

Three quick inputs have swapped Comfort/Soft for Sport/Hard and Sport ESC, and now the Purosangue's brutal brand of athleticism is vindicating the decision to come here in spectacular style. Just as your brain grows uneasy, its calculations around speed and mass and the severity of the upcoming curves prompting a fast-swelling sense of fear, the Ferrari's composure crushes the nascent panic.

The firm and powerful left pedal (in drilled aluminium, naturally) is endlessly reassuring, the very physical deceleration it delivers instantly erasing any excess speed your wanton V12 usage may have brought about. The steering, so slack-free and responsive you must, like a sniper, measure your breathing and consciously moderate your inputs, appears able to send that long, heat-weeping bonnet arcing wherever you choose regardless of speed. And, thanks to those hypnotic hours that came before, the Purosangue and I feel less like two forms working together than one without demarcation; decision-making organism and physics-stretching machine as a raging singularity between shimmering armco.

Then a very strange thing happens. Mid-corner, braced against the Ferrari's unwavering body control, I think about a desk and a telephone and a call nearly 30 years ago; the beat of a butterfly's wings and a chain of events that made this drive, this moment, ▶

In 1995 the road curled around the hillside. Now it cuts right through

WE TRADE LAZY REVS AND BARELY-THERE INPUTS FOR 8000RPM AND GREAT SWEEPS OF THE THROTTLE PEDAL

Then, as now, a Ferrari here spreads more joy than resentment

Exhaust note is cultured at low speed, apocalyptic at full cry inevitable even then. Rounding one corner I see a mountainside much like every other. Only this one is different, familiar. Not from a dream or a previous visit but from a page – a spellbinding image, powerful with incongruity, in which a scarlet 512M speeds along a road cut into a rock face.

The road has changed, sure. But this *is* the spot. Where once it doubled back around each and every crease in the topography, struggling to make genuine, crow-flies progress, now the highway, smooth as glass, runs right through the ridgeline in a cutting 80ft high. But look for it and you can see the old road, blocked off and obsolete. My world, deafening as it is with an engine and chassis under considerable load, grows quiet for a moment, the better to hear what I swear I can hear: a flat-12, an open-gate manual and three pedals working their way east three decades ago.

Two Ferraris, 30 years apart. But so insignificant is the time between them that, so far as this landscape is concerned, ancient, unchanged and sentinel, they might be the same car moments apart, their 12-cylinder cries echoes of one another in eternity.

'I can still see the desk and the phone,' says Richard Bremner, architect of Ferrari to the Sahara the first time around.

Richard joined *CAR* in 1985. The following year he went to Morocco to drive one of the first UK-built Peugeots, a 309, to see if it was at home in a country then, as now, stuffed with old Peugeots, a legacy of Morocco's French colonial rule. Richard was struck by how open and empty the roads were, how beautiful the country was and, pertinently, what an amazing place it would be to bring a supercar. For that poor 309 spent an awful lot of time going as fast as it possibly could, speeding rim to rim across flat-bottomed valleys devoid of a single soul. All of which got Richard thinking.

Fast-forward to 1994 and Bremner, sitting at *that* desk, picks up *that* phone and makes *that* call. Now, *CAR* had a good relationship with Maranello – it had pulled off the first F40 versus Porsche 959 twin test – but this was a huge ask. 'Leave it with me,' said the man from Ferrari, Antonio Ghini. A few days later he called back. So long as Bremner was sure he could get unleaded petrol (he was; he'd spoken to Shell) then the answer was yes. I mean, *can you imagine?*

Timing is everything and Richard's was exquisite. Ghini had an ex-engineering 512M kicking about. He'd been thinking, too, about how bland and samey Ferrari stories were becoming. Maranello was also keen to address the misconception, exacerbated by the tiny annual mileages most owners did, that its cars were fragile. Then came the call from *CAR*. Bremner had his Ferrari.

Its exquisite timing also helps explain the story's enduring legacy. The year 1995 pre-dated the proliferation of both internet access and mobile phones. It was the calm before the online, endlessly connected storm, and perhaps the last time in human history you could take a Ferrari somewhere and reasonably expect that people wouldn't know what it was.

While some in the *CAR* office were uneasy at bowling into what wasn't a wealthy country in a millionaire's car, Richard had a hunch the 512M was more likely to provoke excitement than resentment. So it would prove. Only a pair of teenagers in Marrakesh knew what the car was, asking if it was Ferrari's Diablo riposte. It was. For many Moroccans the Ferrari was as alien and unknowable as a land-bound UFO, and Bremner's story pulses with that wide-eyed wonder. With faultless logic one even asked if, given that in his experience cars had one exhaust pipe and one engine, did the 512M's twin pipes denote two engines?

Much has changed since 1995, not least at Maranello. In the '90s Luca di Montezemolo was busy dragging Ferrari from unprofitable antiquity to something approaching modernity. The F355 and 456GT were both paradigm-shift cars launched early on his watch. Modern Ferrari, complete with an official dealer in Casablanca, is a success story built on shrewd management, savvy commercial moves and that wildly successful stock-market flotation. Revenue in 2022 was ▶

NEARLY 30 YEARS ON FERRARI IS STILL HERE, STILL MAKING STYLISH FLAGSHIPS WITH EXTRAVAGANT ENGINES. AND STILL SAYING YES

car
ALFA SPIDER It's fabulous!
FERRARI TO THE SAHARA

‘RIVAL MAGAZINES THOUGHT THE IMAGES WERE FAKES!’

The enduring legacy of Ferrari to the Sahara

‘It remains my favourite *CAR* story. With his exceptional writing Richard Bremner acted simultaneously as travel guide, social observer and road tester. If it wasn’t for the fact he carried a second spare wheel on the passenger seat you'd swear you were riding shotgun. Tim Wren’s pictures were exceptional, particularly the vanishing-point perspective of the 512M powering across the landscape.’
■ **Philip Rodney, long-term *CAR* reader**

‘My job was to load up our long-term-test Vauxhall Omega with any spares the F512M might need. A spare wheel and tyre, accessory drive belts and a spare ECU, plus a few other bits. None were required. What memories of that epic: driving the Ferrari though the souk in Marrakesh; trundling 30 miles across sand to get to an auberge in the dunes and then waking up to see the Ferrari’s nose sticking out from a line of parked Land Rovers on a expedition. No one had taken a supercar to such an extreme location before; no one imagined that a Ferrari could manage it. I’ll never forget those 10 days.’
■ **Colin Goodwin, former *CAR* staffer, Sahara wingman**

‘I loved the incongruity of that car in that location. And before you read it you assumed the 512M must have elicited some jealousy, and that perhaps it got stolen or beached. That made you want to see if the Ferrari could do it. It wouldn’t have been the same in a Land Cruiser.’
■ **James Taylor, former *CAR* deputy features editor**

‘I remember struggling with the writing because there was so much to say and so much drama to try to convey. The key with these stories is jeopardy, and we got that big time. For a moment, when we struggled to find unleaded in the last town before the desert, it even looked like the goal of the whole thing – to get a picture of the Ferrari in the sand dunes – might not happen. But we did it.’
■ **Richard Bremner, writer and former editor**

‘It was a very left-field idea. Even more so for Ferrari, whose media tests invariably involved local Maranello roads or racing circuits. But PR man Ghini was commendably receptive. That said it was very much “our” story rather than a trip organised and funded by a car maker. There was some scepticism when it published. At least one rival thought the photographs were fakes.’
■ **Gavin Green, columnist and former editor**

MARRAKESH’S FORTIFIED CORE IS A PERFECT BARRIER TO PEACEFUL PROGRESS BY CAR

a touch over €5bn with 13,000 cars sold. And in late summer 2022, after years of conjecture, Maranello pulled the covers off the Purosangue, its first four-door and the first car in its history not to sit as low to the road as was practicably possible.

Nearly 30 years on Ferrari is still here; still making stylish flagships with extravagant engines. And still saying yes.

No faster than shifting tectonic plates the ferry drops its twin ramps and, with one almighty clang, sets us free – free to drive into Africa.

On the dockside, chaos. In the Ferrari’s sumptuous cabin, calm. Despite sharing a hold with idling refrigerated trucks for the last couple of hours the car’s display indicates a decent level of air quality. Fully fuelled, the read-out shows some 370 miles of range (we’ll average 17mpg). And the fierce drop-off from the ferry ramp to the dockside holds no fear in a car with plenty of ride height, not to mention a body-lift function should we need more. Doing the same in a more typical Ferrari would be slower, more stressful, scrapier. (In ’95 customs officers went at the 512M’s sills with a screwdriver with such fervour Bremner feared having to find a panel beater to put right the damage; three decades on we’re harmlessly X-rayed and sniffed by dogs.) There is, it turns out, nothing remotely slow, stressful or scrapey about the Purosangue.

This stretch of motorway south from Tangier to Marrakesh is Morocco at its most developed – nearly 400 miles of immaculate, toll-maintained motorway with Shell , McDonald’s and Burger King. You could be in Spain but for the currency and the signs, many of which show place names in Arabic and Tifinagh, written Berber.

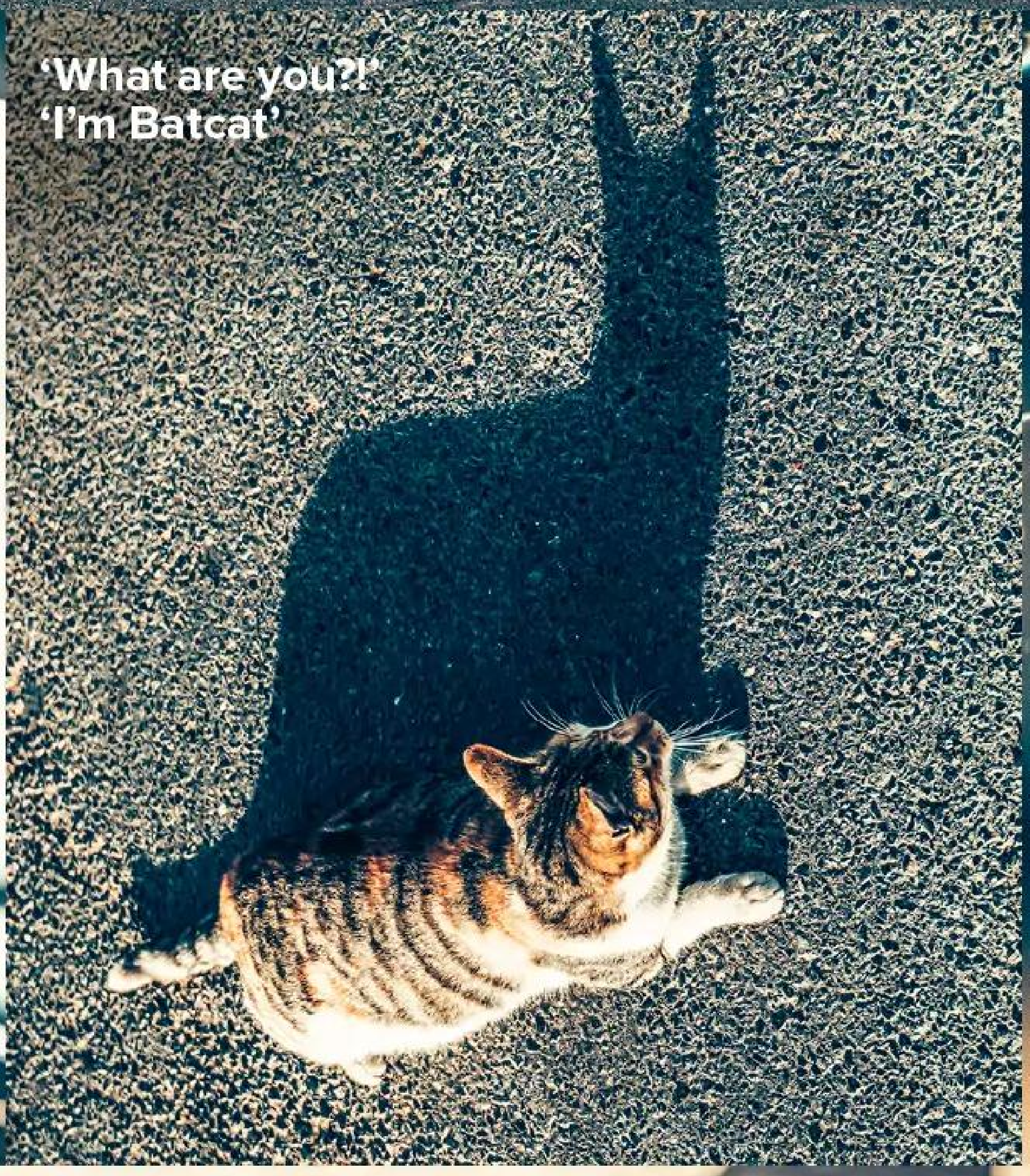
When *CAR* came in the 512M only a fraction of this road was motorway; a single short stretch just north of Marrakesh. My illustrious predecessors decided to celebrate with a brief 150mph squirt, to better hear and feel the flat-12 uncorked. That twilight speed run nearly ended abruptly against the back of a dawdling, unlit dump truck, and 30 years on this still isn’t a great place to extend a 12-cylinder Ferrari… Immaculately uniformed officers hang out at every toll stop, and less than two hours after landing I’m being beckoned into a van for a little chat…

The charge? That’ll be 130km/h in a 120km/h limit. The evidence? A crystal-clear shot of the Ferrari’s prow, apparently moving through the warm Moroccan air with excessive speed. The image is so sharp you can see the handful of Haribo Starmix going into my mouth. The punishment? A 150 dirham/£12 fine. I have no cash.

My cop shouts to his partner, presumably asking after their card machine. His colleague saunters over and, as he gets closer, breaks into a broad grin. He says something and laughs. Now my friend is laughing too, chuckling so hard tears prick his eyes. ‘We cannot fine Mr Bean. Welcome in Morocco, Mr Bean!’ This face may not open doors but it can, it seems, quash speeding tickets in Africa.

The transition from cruise-controlled, calm-as-a-cucumber motorway to fire-and-brimstone Marrakesh is as abrupt as it is violent. (If only finding cruise control was more straightforward. Its touch controls, which call the left steering-wheel spoke home, remain unlit and mysterious until you wake the system – not always easy with the haptic controls’ fickle temperament.) The city is neither particularly large nor difficult to navigate. But its fortified core is ▶

The apparently Atkinson-esque face that's defused a thousand speeding tickets



'What are you?!' 'I'm Batcat'

Design boss Manzoni was never outwardly worried. Now we see why

THIS STORY ORIGINALLY APPEARED IN THE **FEBRUARY 2024 ISSUE OF *CAR***

Less than two hours on a ferry, Morocco is a masterpiece

WE NEED A ROAD WORTHY OF THE CAR. IN THE MAJESTIC TIZI N'TICHKA, WE'LL FIND IT

as perfect a barrier to the peaceful progress of vehicles as it's possible to imagine, certainly those with four wheels – the packs of scooters move easily like shoals of fish on unseen currents.

From the motorway you can effortlessly lap the city on a ring road of broad boulevards. But if you want to see this place properly, to feel its energy, then you need to push into its cramped centre.

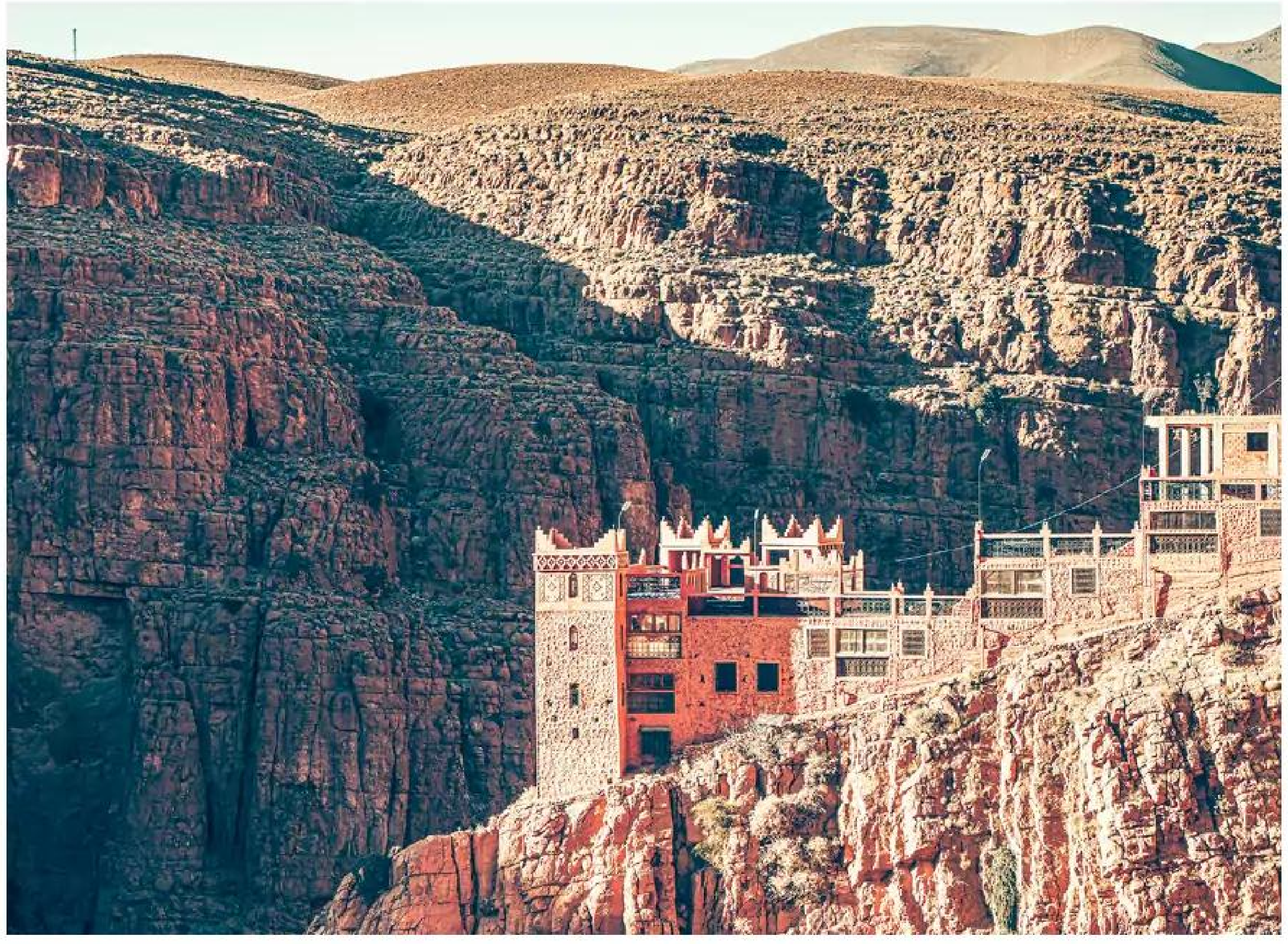
That starts with archways barely wide enough for the Ferrari's mirrors, and into which you must simply force yourself: two-way traffic and a portal big enough for one car simply doesn't work otherwise. Timidity is punished with a conspicuous lack of forward progress, the traffic behind you building exponentially, in both quantity and ill-temper, as you wait. In a Ferrari on Italian plates we've no chance of blending in. But drive as everyone else drives – positively, decisively, forcefully, even – and you can at least move with the storm, like a galleon with sails and anchor stowed. And that is infinitely preferable to pitching yourself against it, a sure path to tears and pain and mangled aluminium.

This, Morocco's fourth largest city and one of Africa's very busiest, is not a place to drive windows up, stereo on. Let it in. It's late afternoon now and the city's dusky pink walls are by turns cool and muted in the shade and hot-ember warm in the dying rays. Smoke is ever present, the aromas bringing on painful hunger pangs for anyone with an empty stomach. Blue-grey two-stroke fumes hang in the air like incense. Donkeys and camels jostle with the mopeds and the minivans amid an endless stream of Dacia taxis.

The chatter of conversation, the cries of the hard-working hustlers, parping horns, squealing brakes… Driving here is, according to the internet, the stuff of nightmares. In truth it's special, as memorable as California's Pacific Coast Highway or Italy's Amalfi coast, just in a very different way. In 1995 the 512M picked its way through to the bustling main square, Jemaa el-Fnaa, with its snake charmers and food stalls, but that's off limits these days, a prized machine calibrated for the efficient extraction of tourist dirhams.

In this labyrinthine city the Ferrari helps and hinders in equal measure. Visibility is a mixed bag. Yes, the driving position is elevated versus every other Ferrari in the company's 75-year history. But you can't see much out of the back and that endless bonnet creates a faintly terrifying blind spot on the far side of the nose. At least the effortless steering and superb brakes are on your side, as are the hard-working blind-spot assists on each side mirror and the parking sensors, all of which work overtime as you try to tease what isn't a small car (just over two metres wide, a smidge under five metres long and 1.58 metres from floor to carbonfibre roof; a panoramic glass roof is an option) between boundaries defined organically, over centuries, by the movement of smaller, squidgier objects.

In the cool, dark calm after sundown the Ferrari and I gaze longingly at the map and at the mountains to the south, silhouetted against the twilight sky. To date the Purosangue's proved almost faultless. But you don't bring a V12 Ferrari all this way to cruise motorways and battle through cities. We need a road worthy of the car. In the majestic Tizi n'Tichka, the mountain pass that corkscrews up to an ear-popping 2200 metres between savage slopes and snow-dusted peaks, we'll find it. car



The harder you go, the lower it drops

FERRARI TO THE SAHARA: PART 2

DUNE: PART TWO

Inspired by a *CAR* adventure drive nearly 30 years ago, we're driving a Ferrari to the Sahara desert – 3.5 million square miles of eerie, beautiful emptiness. But first, the Atlas mountains…

Words Ben Miller **Photography** Olgun Kordal

National Route 9, an awe-inspiring mountain road wrought from an old caravan trail by the French military, is so narratively perfect it's as though this place were created not by time and pressure but by a scriptwriter. For travellers heading south it begins in Marrakesh, the ancient fortress city, and snakes high into the Atlas mountains, the Sahara's northern boundary in this corner of Africa, before tobogganing down to the bleached, sun-baked sprawl of Ouarzazate, gateway to the desert. Stretched between contrasting locations, spellbinding in its scale and scope and so beautiful it makes you weep for the fragile beauty of this planet, it is a storyteller's dream.

And a Ferrari's.

We slink out of Marrakesh before sunrise, climb the foothills as dawn begins to turn the sky luminous and hit the good stuff just as the sun clears the ridgeline and the road, previously sinuous but curving rather than chaotic, begins to crumple against the immovable mass of the High Atlas, buckling back on itself in ferociously twisted ribbons of captivating tarmac.

It is here, as in 1995, that our pilgrimage to the Sahara goes up (or, more accurately, down) a gear (or four). For this is a place and a road that could have been created for the express purpose of hedonism in cars of bewildering potency. In the original story Richard Bremner talks of battering the 512M's silver-balled gearlever, of its flat-12 blaring, of windows dropped to better hear the engine's spectacular cry, of feet skipping on pedals, and of arms twirling the unassisted steering this way and that. Close your eyes and even now, all these years later, you can see it, hear it, almost smell it; you can, with a little effort, recall an experience you never lived but which somehow feels more real than many you have.

Now, as then, there are no signs of the winter snows that can see the N9 gated shut, particularly between January and March. Today is a perfect winter's day, the air crisp but mild in the Californian style. So perfect, in fact, I'm in no hurry to see it pass. The Purosangue, on the other hand, appears hell-bent on rocketing its way across this stretch of road as quickly as it can.

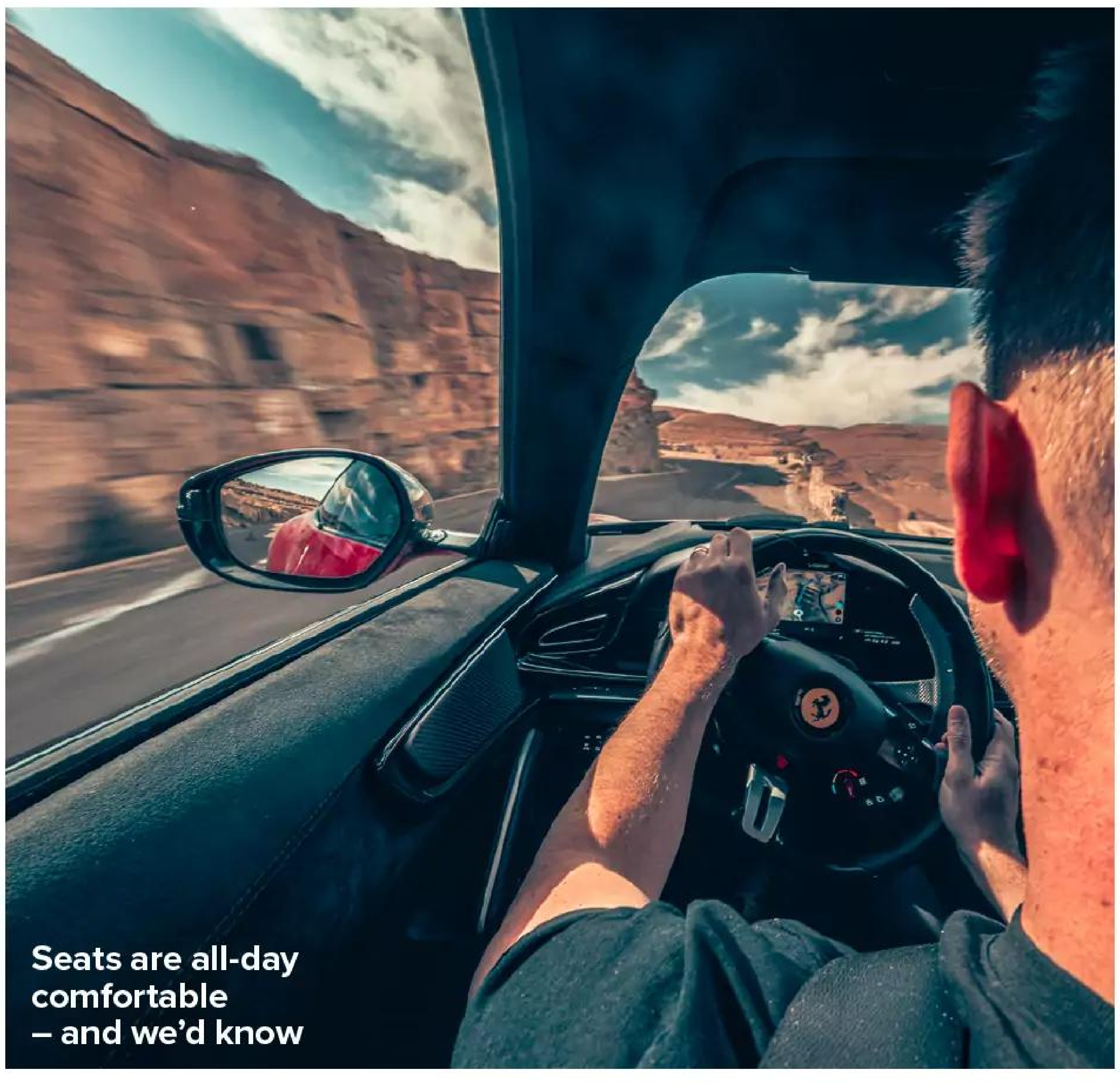
To be in its hot seat on a road like this is a curious fusion of the calm and the cacophonous, the composed and the chaotic, that 6.5-litre V12 the ever-goading anarchist. The car's remarkable active suspension is little short of revelatory, fortifying this high and heavy (a shade over two tonnes) 4x4 with a formidable arsenal of traditionally contradictory attributes: rock-solid composure with compliance; keen turn-in without a shred of flightiness (certainly once the tyres are warm); ready-for-anything wheel travel with a confidence-swelling sense of control. But so colossal is the V12's appetite for speed, and so hopelessly weak is this soul in the face of its temptation, that still the Purosangue refuses to deliver anything other than a world-filling, life-affirming, memory-searing symphony of a drive.

Leaving another hillside village of stacked homes and sleepy, slow-moving humanity, I crank the *manettino* to Sport/Hard (where Ferrari's old bumpy-road mode was a one-size-fits-all affair, you now get damper settings within each mode), set the gearbox to manual and pack our remaining snacks tightly into the door bins and glovebox. They'll soon be flung all over the cabin like a lightly salted plane crash nonetheless.

With your foot to the floor, first, second ▶

THE STORY SO FAR...

In 1995 *CAR*'s Richard Bremner thrashed a 512M all the way from Maranello to the dunes of the Sahara. The story blew minds and redefined the magazine adventure drive. Nearly 30 years on we're following in those wheel tracks in the Purosangue.



Seats are all-day comfortable – and we'd know

IT’S A CURIOUS FUSION OF THE CALM AND THE CACOPHONOUS, THAT 6.5-LITRE V12 THE EVER-GOADING ANARCHIST

What on Earth will *CAR* be bringing here in 2055?

Central rotary works well, as does the drive/reverse/ neutral panel that mimics the 512M's open-gate manual

TIME AND DISTANCE, USUALLY SO RIGID IN THEIR RELATIONSHIP, MELT LIKE WARM WAX

and third gears simply vanish, eviscerated by 715bhp, 528lb ft and the zero-loss traction of four fat Michelins working on warm dry tarmac.

It's tempting to think, given that a 512M looks like a child's drawing of a supercar and the Purosangue a crossover, that the flat-12 two-seater might have been the faster car over these roads. Based on the raw numbers at least, that's unlikely. In 1995 joyriding Moroccan passengers climbed out of the 512M unable to stand or to speak, dumbfounded by the Ferrari's warped physics. Nearly 30 years later the Purosangue uproots goalposts and challenges the impossible with the same startling alacrity.

The M was good for 440bhp, revved to 6750rpm, went 0-62mph in 4.7 seconds and ran the quarter-mile in around 12.7 seconds. The 715bhp Purosangue revs to 8250rpm and goes 0-62mph a full 1.5 seconds quicker. A second quicker over the quarter-mile, too, it is decadently fast, not least because its composure soon has you spanking the V12 as you might the 1.0-litre four in a holiday rental, with predictably outrageous effects on your average speed.

The steering, so taut and quick-racked it doesn't forgive a moment's inattention on the motorway, feels perfectly judged now, effortlessly switching direction as we work our way higher and higher, rapidly gaining altitude via endless sequences of interwoven switchbacks. The brakes annihilate unwanted speed, and the corner speed you can carry – thanks to the tyres' gummy grip and body's pig-headed refusal to keel over more than a couple of degrees – takes some getting used to. Arrival times on Google Maps (no in-built navigation, remember) tumble like an altimeter in free-fall.

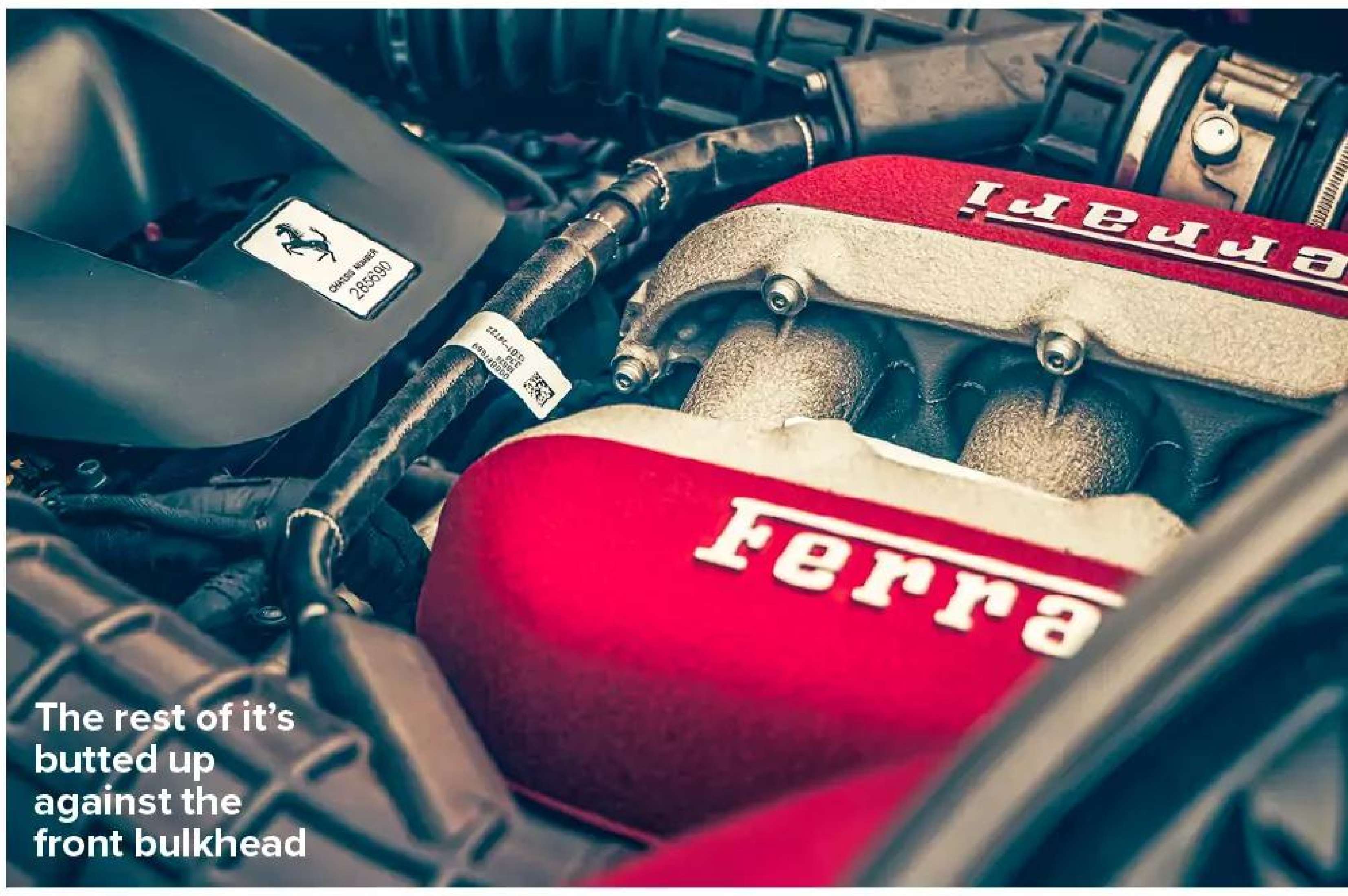
A new level of performance for SUV-kind? It certainly feels that way, though Aston Martin is entitled to argue. More than once it's only the sense of the car rotating beneath me, rather than around me, that reminds me we're not slung low in a conventional supercar. Indeed, paired with its relatively high hip point, the Ferrari's combination of physics-defying suspension, rampant acceleration, brick-wall braking and high-g agility (the latter abetted by a version of the 812 Competition's independent rear-wheel steering) is almost a bit much on particularly intense stretches of road, my squidgy organic form the weak link in the eye of this mercilessly physical storm. It never feels artificial, mind – remarkable given so much of its behaviour is defined by lines of code rather than the somehow more organic movements of springs and anti-roll bars.

The Purosangue is also neutral, almost to a fault, feeling less overtly rear-driven in most instances than, say, Porsche's Macan GTS. Excessive entry speeds are met with safe understeer, and you must dial back the ESC should you want the V12's help to finish those corner exits with a flourish. The result is a fearsomely capable all-weather, all-roads machine. But were the Ferrari fitted with a torque-bias control, Toyota GR Yaris style, I'd be twisting it rearward.

The journey east, after a fuel stop in Ouarzazate, is a bewildering display of Morocco's raw beauty. With the mountains behind us the pace of change slows, the road running plumb-line straight across what feels like the raw face of the Earth, so vast are the views. Nothing moves but the birds and the goats. There is some fuel, thankfully, but the stations are cash-only, their unadorned forecourts scattered with the weathered crankcases of long-dead engines like cast-iron carrion.

The Purosangue settles back into a fast, low-effort cruise. Gnarled ▶

We couldn't come all this way and not bring a (model) 512M



The rest of it's butted up against the front bulkhead

HOTEL PISCINE
RESTAURANT
KASBAH

Not an accurate size comparison (but not all that far off)

This fast made this easy? You'd think that deserves a smile

Local traffic runs on off-road rubber or walks on all fours milestones flash past. Time and distance, usually so rigid in their relationship, melt like warm wax. This, ultimately, is where your money goes. Making land travel this fast and this easy is expensive, and the Purosangue is not cheap: £313,360 before options, and likely north of £400,000 if you spec it like a typical buyer. The 512M cost £138,000 in 1995, or £270,000 adjusted for inflation, putting it on a par with the V6 hybrid 296 GTB in Maranello's current line-up.

It's not hard to see where that money goes. This is one dense ball of exotic engineering. The aluminium-intensive body (complete with 450-litre boot) may not use swathes of composites but the suicide rear doors are powered and wilfully weird if effective by design. The vast wheels – 22 inches at the front, 23 at the rear (the 512M's tiny 18-inch turbines were surely cooler) – are slowed by carbon-ceramic brakes and a fiendishly complex by-wire system originally developed for the 296 GTB. It allows for the fluctuating levels of negative torque hybrids must tolerate as they dip in and out of regen. And though this Purosangue isn't hybrid the system's here nonetheless, giving more flexibility over the brake bias than would be possible with conventional brakes. It's a superb system, with a firm and accurate pedal, and bodes well for Ferrari's electric supercar in 2025.

As does, potentially, the suspension. As far back as 2018, no sooner had it confirmed the car was coming, Ferrari began talking about the Purosangue's game-changing active bouncy bits. The system comprises four special dampers with token coil springs and no anti-roll bars. Each Multimatic unit features a damper rod but threaded rather than smooth, their teeth meshed with gears mounted to powerful three-phase electric motors built into the damper units.

Now, force your brain to consider that the actual springs do almost nothing. They're present only to keep the car from sagging to the floor like an old Citroën when you turn it off. Instead everything – including the effective spring rate at any given moment, the dynamic ride height and the way in which the car moves as you drive – is the product of the ECU and the actions of those four electric motors. The car has complete, virtually instantaneous control over its behaviour, opening up a sandbox (appropriate…) of dynamic opportunity. To think the 512M had no electronic suspension adjustment whatsoever, though it did have pairs of damper units on each rear corner. Which is cool.

And then there's the engine. Read contemporary tests of the 512M and they follow the same pattern: moan, moan, dated; moan, moan, awkward; moan, moan… but oh my God the engine! Back then it was the only car on sale with a flat-12 engine, Ferrari having used the format in F1 for years, until ground effect turned up and demanded a narrower, more packaging-friendly layout. The M's engine was special. So too is the Purosangue's. Some have questioned the wisdom of a rev-hungry, naturally-aspirated unit in this application. Torque-rich turbocharged engines and electric motors are certainly better at masking weight and responding to lazy, low-rev demands for instant acceleration. But such level-headed and objectively credible arguments don't last long in the presence of this engine's colossal charisma. It wants only for the 512M's open-gate manual, even if that notion is as insane as it is exquisite.

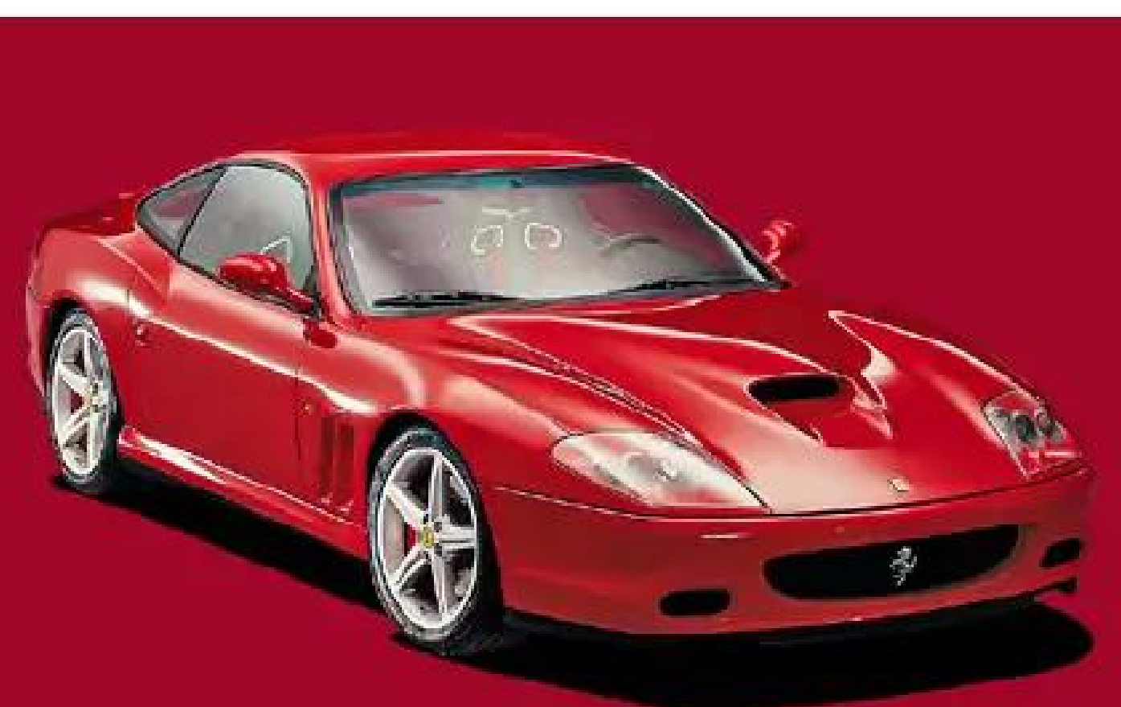
IT WANTS ONLY FOR THE 512M'S OPEN-GATE MANUAL, EVEN IF THAT NOTION IS INSANE

Covering great swathes of the African continent, the Sahara comprises some 3.5 million square miles of eerie, beautiful emptiness. While much of it is rocky rather than sandy, its towering dunes are ▶

TRAVEL IN 12-CYLINDER STYLE

365 GTB/4 'DAYTONA'
By rights it should have been mid-engined. By '68, when this slug of Colombo-engined decadence launched, everyone knew fast cars needed to have their engines in the middle. But without its V12 up front the Daytona wouldn't have looked this fabulous, nor would it have been such a wicked mile-eater.

BERLINETTA BOXER
2024 can't hold a candle to the '70s BB dream. Slide aboard in dreary London, ideally with some company, point the flat-12-engined wedge south and batter France with easy 180mph performance. Cote d'Azur by dinner, with a platoon of apoplectic and exasperated gendarmes arriving some hours later? Lovely.



575M MARANELLO
After the mid-engined dynasty that began with the BB and culminated in the 512M, the arrival of 1996's front-engined V12 Maranello took Ferrari's flagship full circle. Gorgeous and light years ahead of the 512M dynamically, the 550 was evolved into the even prettier and more powerful 575M for 2002.

FF 'FERRARI FOUR'
A Ferrari with four driven wheels? The world was sceptical. *CAR*, too, was sceptical, even getting down on our hands and knees at the launch to check out the second gearbox hanging off the front of the V12. It really was there, and it really worked, provided you had the *manettino* in the right drive mode.

THE SCENE IS RICH WITH THE INCONGRUITY AT THE HEART OF RICHARD BREMNER'S ORIGINAL IDEA

An adventure worthy of the first adventure-ready Ferrari

the manifestation of its vast and unknowable otherness; its hot, dry and otherworldly enormity.

Running hard against the dying light, we begin to lose the sun in swirling storms of dust. Shredded plastic flutters like Tibetan prayer flags on barbed wire fences and, where sand streams across the road like a dry flash flood, the lumpen grey tarmac is lost to the desert. The Purosangue is relentless: stoic in these body-rocking crosswinds, impervious to the suspension-testing subsidence and, with its filter-protected V12, tireless over these vast distances.

The dunes at Erg Chebbi appear like an optical illusion, miles away still yet already monolithic, their draw inexorable. As we get closer they look no more real, their weird beauty hard to trust in this age of AI-altered imagery.

But they are real. And here you can drive right into them. I slow, lift the body on its suspension, toggle Comfort/Soft and drop from the tarmac onto the hard-packed grit and rock that stretches to the dunes. They could drive these stretches in the 512M, too, but deep sand was impassable, as guaranteed to beach the rear-drive, low-slung supercar as wet cement. In truth the Purosangue is little different, and deliberately so. Yes, it holds its body higher off the ground, and yes it sends its power to all four wheels. But it was never conceived as an off-roader, let alone a dune basher. Just skirting between the steep sand slopes, finding a way through this alien landscape of golden, granular hills and lonely, skeletal trees, you feel the soft sand's cloying grasp, the Michelins spinning on its ethereal, traction-less liquidity and the Ferrari sliding suddenly sideways on a whisper of V12 effort.

It's way more than we asked for. This landmark Ferrari has excelled time and again, over more than 900 brutal miles (1800 by the time it's safely home). Biting cold, fierce heat, fast motorway days, the melee of Marrakesh, 8200rpm gearchanges, mountain passes, rough-hewn roadworks, eye-watering sandstorms – the Purosangue has monstered them all; reliable, omni-talented, unfailingly special. Was this journey tougher and more dramatic in 1995, in the mid-engined 512M? Of course. Does that in any way diminish the emotional heft of this drive in this car? It does not.

Hours later, after dark, the dunes are transformed. The winds are gone, the screaming storm with them, and in their wake all is peaceful. Climbing a ridge the scene is rich with the incongruity at the heart of Richard Bremner's original idea. Below, just visible in the inky blackness, sits the still and silent Purosangue, its tyres grey with dust. Where I stoop to grab a handful the sand flows through my fingers like silken, bone-dry water. Somewhere out in the darkness an archaic pick-up truck shudders, bangs and coughs its last, rolling to a halt on the distant road. The silence floods in once again, and with it a weird sense, out here at least, of the arbitrary nature of time. And I think of the 512M, here in this same spot all those years ago.

Two Ferraris, 30 years apart. But so insignificant is the time between them that, so far as this landscape is concerned, ancient, unchanged and sentinel, they might be the same car moments apart, echoes of one another in eternity. **car**

THIS
STORY
ORIGINALLY
APPEARED IN THE
MARCH 2024
ISSUE OF
CAR

FIVE ALIVE

It makes 829bhp. It's worth over £7m. Only five will be built. And we've had a world-exclusive drive in it: the new Pagani Codalunga

Words Piers Ward **Photography** Alex Tapley

The mercury is hovering in low single figures, wet asphalt and winter gloom conspiring to keep tyre temperature well below optimum. The narrow Italian road, no more than the width of a car and a half, snakes ahead. Or at least I imagine it does, because the mist is so heavy that visibility is reduced to mere metres. The tarmac beneath the wheels is no treacle-smooth racetrack – instead it harbours nasty off-camber sections and hidden fractures, both lying in wait to spit an errant wheel into the gutter.

And our chosen car for this delightful setting? The one-of-five Pagani Codalunga, seven million quid's worth of hand-built beauty. Rear-wheel drive, bi-turbo V12, 829bhp, and enough bespoke carbonfibre to make an F1 team blush. When Horacio Pagani and his team were creating this exquisite car at the factory near Modena, the mood board did not contain today's conditions.

First gear engaged, every sinew of the Codalunga is begging to be given more freedom. Even at low speed, the single-clutch robotised manual wants to hunt forward, eager to get on with things.

But here we must pause, because the car deserves a proper introduction. The Codalunga is what happens when billionaires are bored. In a world where those at the very top of the *Forbes* rich list struggle to set themselves apart from their mega-wealthy pals, the Codalunga is a limited-run variant of the already niche Huayra, of which Pagani has built 300, a figure that's hardly troubling the Toyota Corolla in the record books.

It's important that you remove all sense of reason or real-world thought when contemplating these cars and these customers. I'm not being all Jeremy Corbyn here – fantastically wealthy people can, on the whole, spend their money as they see fit as far as I'm concerned; the point is that the parameters within which most of the world operates simply don't apply.

They don't want normal cars from normal car companies. It's why they have a direct line to the man whose name is above the door and why the client/company relationship is so vital to Pagani. The company operates with a mantra of 'our customer is our work-giver', with Pagani himself under no illusions as to how vital they are: 'They are our number-one asset. We have a very direct relationship to them and they enjoy that the story [of Pagani] is real.'

Leather luggage gets the same loving touch

The Codalunga is what happens when billionaires are bored: a limited run of the Huayra hypercar

In fact, two customers are the very reason the Codalunga came to be. Both multiple Pagani owners, the pals approached the firm back in 2018 with a very brief brief, focused around the Huayra but with added uniqueness and a sprinkling of inspiration from Le Mans prototypes of the 1960s and '70s.

Lorenzo Kerkoc, head of special projects at Pagani, is one of the team who made their vision come to life. 'They didn't want to have an extreme car, a car for racing. They wanted a car for participating in concours d'elegance in order to be able to show as much as possible the elegance of the car.'

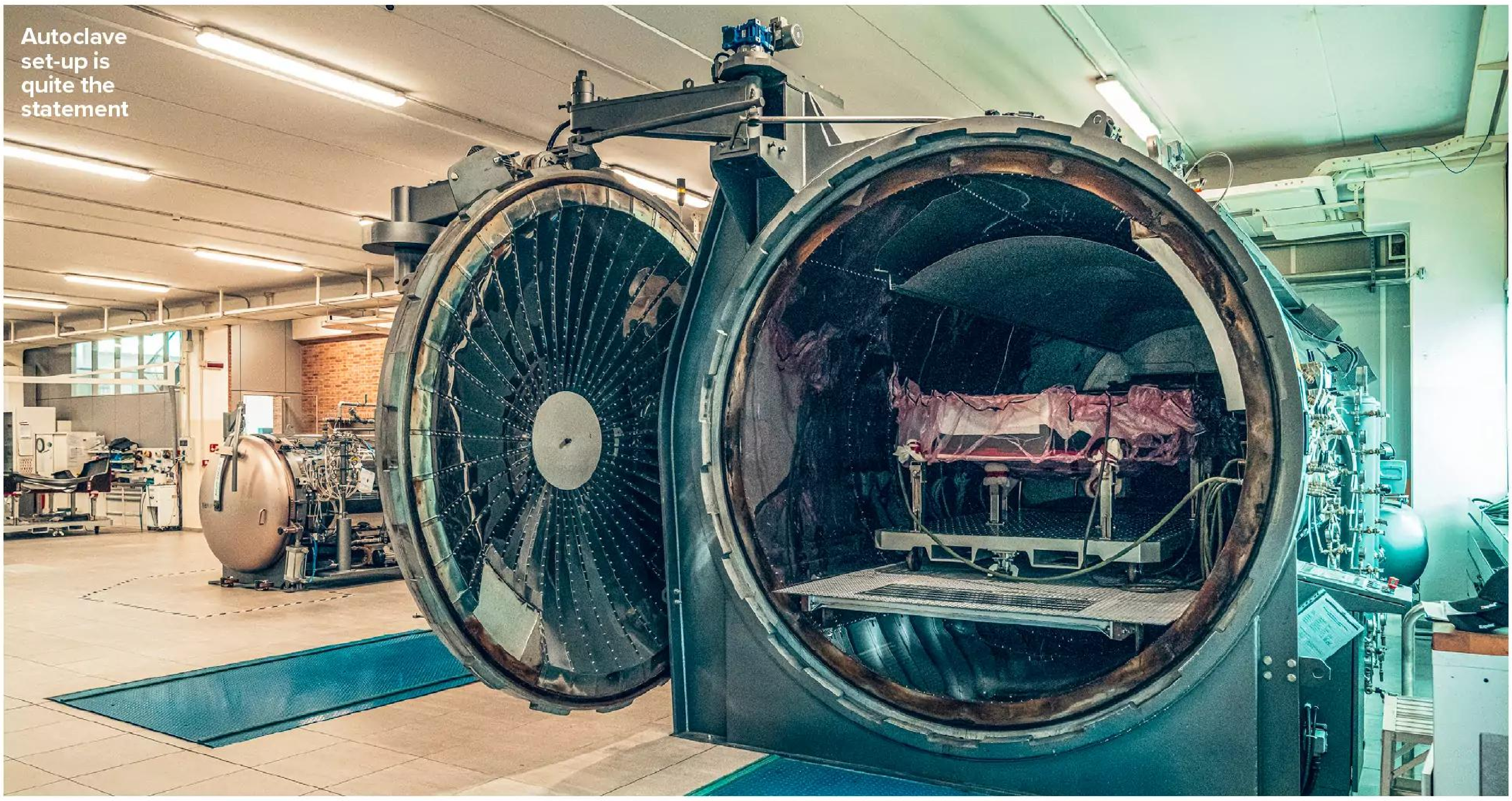
Simplification was the order of the day, elongating the bodywork (the Codalunga is 307mm longer than a Huayra) and giving it a hand-made look in the best tradition of Italian coachbuilders. Even at this stratosphere, operating within the confines of what is practical is still a consideration, with Kerkoc performing a daily tightrope exercise between customer desire and real-world realities.

'We didn't want to lengthen the car too much for many different reasons,' he tells us. 'But the customer wanted to make it longer so we started to think about shortening the front, in order to unbalance the car to the rear, in terms of the visuals. By reducing the front, we maintained the length that we had initially thought for the rear but still with the unbalanced look towards the back.'

The original idea was to use a Huayra donor car, but as the project developed it took on a life of its own. The Codalunga was built using a new carbonfibre monocoque, new suspension, a lighter exhaust and a tweaked engine, extracting an extra 37bhp from its V12 – which, as in the Huayra, is from AMG but wears a Pagani badge. So even at this end of the scale, it was clear that more than the initially commissioned two cars would need to be built in order to keep the project solvent. The monocoque alone, globally homologated with all the crash testing that involves, was a huge investment. It's certified for use in the US, as one of the owners lives there. A price in excess of £7m, including VAT, is always likely to ▶

Interior colour coordinated to body

Name refers to the longtail look, a tribute to Le Mans legends


Autoclave set-up is quite the statement

Not your average bit of manufacturer merch

Aluminium billet and hand-made: it's the Pagani way

Utopia is built at the same work stations as Codalunga

‘The customer is our number one asset. We have a very direct relationship’

HORACIO PAGANI

make your head spin, but it at least begins to make sense when you grasp the complexity involved in building the five cars.

And don’t for one minute think that Pagani has now found its upper limit. In fact, company and customers alike have been inspired and emboldened by the Codalunga project, and so Pagani will be fitting out private jets and penthouse apartments in Dubai plus other projects, yet-to-be-revealed. The company’s current thinking around how ambitious it can be – and how far it can stray from building supercars – is summed up by Kerkoc: ‘We never start with no.’

It’s why the factory (‘atelier’ in Pagani-speak) is set up like it is. Rolls-Royce will tell you that it’s an exclusive manufacturer, but it still has a production line and sales of 6000 a year. Pagani is in a different league. It builds about 50 cars a year and the vast majority of the processes are done in-house, which gives the flexibility to build one-offs and offer the sort of aftersales services (see sidebar) that are so vital to its revenues.

Each work station has its own team of people, from the carbonfibre autoclaves (three of them, including the original that Pagani himself bought while he was working at Lamborghini, all painted Bronze Aymara like the Huayra launch colour and branded with the Pagani logo) to the chaps spending five days *per car* on final polish and checks. Teamwork is essential. Not only because coordination is vital if you’re laying carbonfibre panels for a 3.7 square metre rear cowl with three guys all scrabbling to get the pieces lined up to the millimetre, but also because with such a small workforce people need to be able to operate easily with one another.

As each bit moves through the various stations, workers are striding back and forth to constantly review and check: as the interior is bolted together, someone from the carbonfibre department upstairs wields a caliper gauge to double-check a dimension. In the best traditions of Toyota, every part is stamped and traceable, but with only two machines in the entire plant (the carbonfibre ‘plotter’ and the autoclave), it’s the additional human element that impresses here. The fingers and hands give it a sense of real love.

None of this will come as a surprise if you’ve ever had the good fortune to meet the boss. From the aluminium signature on each car to the genuine Italian street lights dotted around the factory (sounds kitsch, isn’t), his vision and presence are apparent everywhere. The self-conviction that percolates through Horacio Pagani’s CV – rapidly progressing to chief engineer at Lamborghini – tells you all you need to know about how the company operates.

He doesn’t dominate the room physically, but he has huge charisma, the sense that everything about the company is in his gravitational field. He also has a knack of putting you at your ease. Not because he’s extraordinarily charming – plenty of CEOs of luxury car makers share that trait – but just in little details that humanise him, like apologising because his phone is pinging a lot while we speak; turns out he’s in the midst of a flat move in Milan.

The fact that he’s generous with his time to a visitor like me doesn’t mean he’s anything but focused on the job in hand. His vision is targeted with an accuracy that other company bosses can only dream of. A modern-day Ron Dennis.

Lots of CEOs like to tell you that they walk the floor and know ▶

Arthur Daley does supercars

Pagani’s used car solution

In Pagani-world, used cars take on a slightly different hue. The company has hit upon a three-tier process to tailor a more bespoke package depending on what the new owner of an old Pagani wants: Puro (to verify the authenticity), Rinascimento (restoring the vehicle to its original condition) and Unico (the potential to replace and update virtually everything on the car).

Customisation is at the heart of the scheme. Just as a buyer of a new Pagani can stipulate all manner of unique features, so too can a secondhand owner. No matter the age of the car, every owner can feel special.

While we are visiting the factory, a Zonda S turns up that’s already had several upgrades from the standard car. But the new owner wants it turned into a 760, so it’s in the process of having elements including the aero and interior trim changed.

What’s really clever about the scheme is its pick ’n’ mix nature – owners can select the greatest hits of their model, be it Zonda, Huayra or Utopia, or indeed any of the Pagani specials that have been released in the 25 years of the company’s existence. When you think that there are 21 different versions across the three model lines, the possibilities are near limitless. And these go on forever, as and when each car gets sold on again.

Every single car that has ever come out of the atelier could, at its owner’s request, get booked in for an upgrade or refurb at any time, and the list is constantly growing as more new cars are built. More than 40 Paganis went through the aftersales system last year, which means that this team is just as busy as the main shop floor building new cars.

And because it all comes from the factory, with the same Pagani autoclaves turning out either brand new Utopia body panels or Zonda wings, it has the stamp of authenticity.

their customers. But with Pagani, it's taken to another level. Because his company does so much fabrication in-house, the buck quite clearly stops with him. Even before our interview he spies us from afar, sticks his hand out to greet us mid-stride, and then he's off, leaning over employees' shoulders and making adjustments and suggestions. He is involved everywhere, for instance testing every single gearbox lever as it comes off the line, because the click-clack has to be just so.

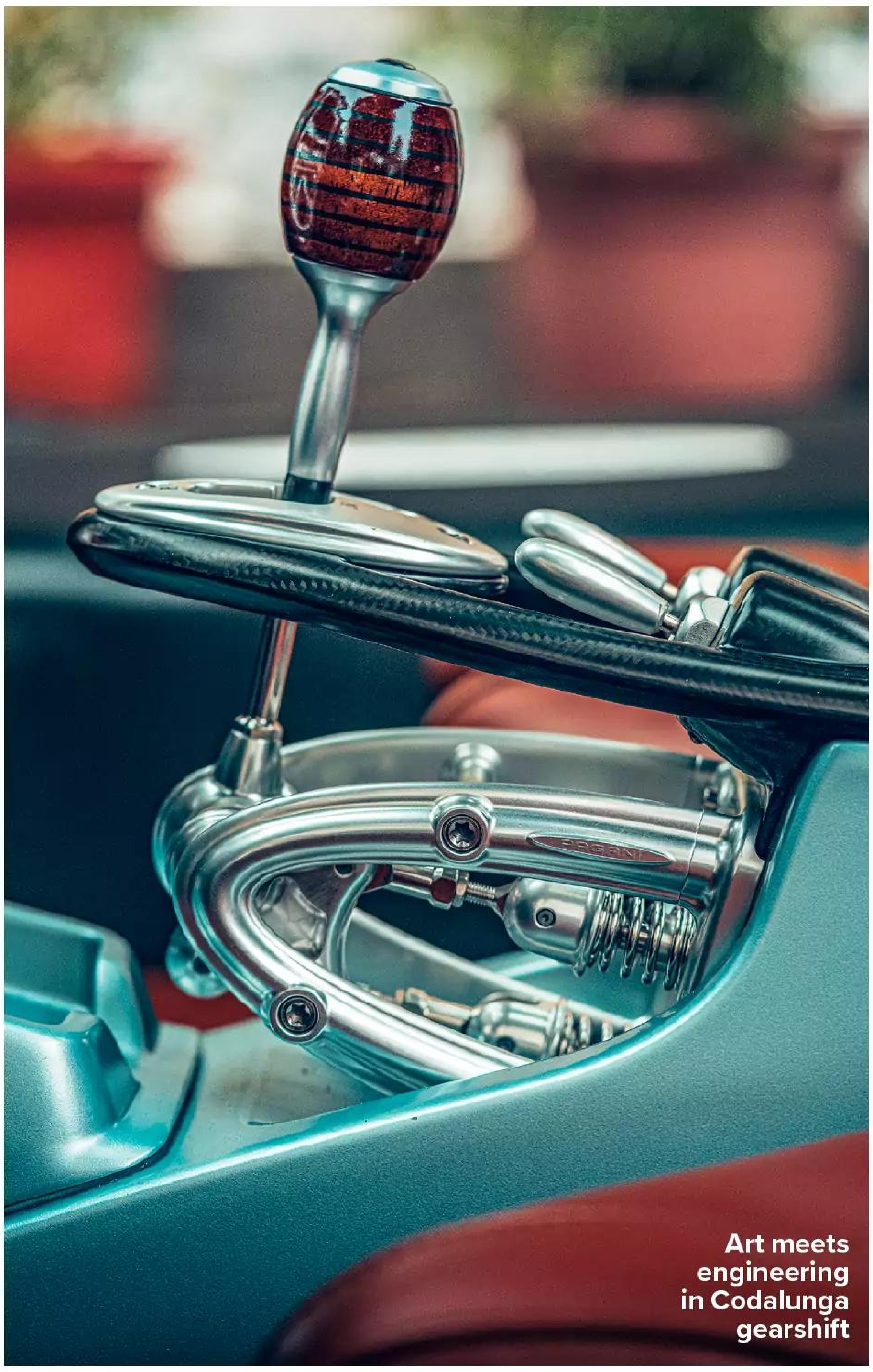
It's the first thing I try when I jump in the Codalunga, Horacio's words ringing in my ears: 'They [the customers] want everything to feel real and manufactured by us. We want to send out an analogue car where you can interact directly and physically – the car gives you a response through the feeling and the click.'

It's why every bit of aluminium is hewn from block, a solidity you can feel as instantly as your backside drops into the seat. No other car maker gets anywhere close to the distinctiveness of a Pagani interior, steam punk meets alien spaceship. Almost everything is wonderfully welcoming and logically laid out, with the odd nod to modernity in the form of a central display screen, but there are idiosyncrasies. Things like the convex cover on the climate buttons so that 'auto' reads like you're six pints in.

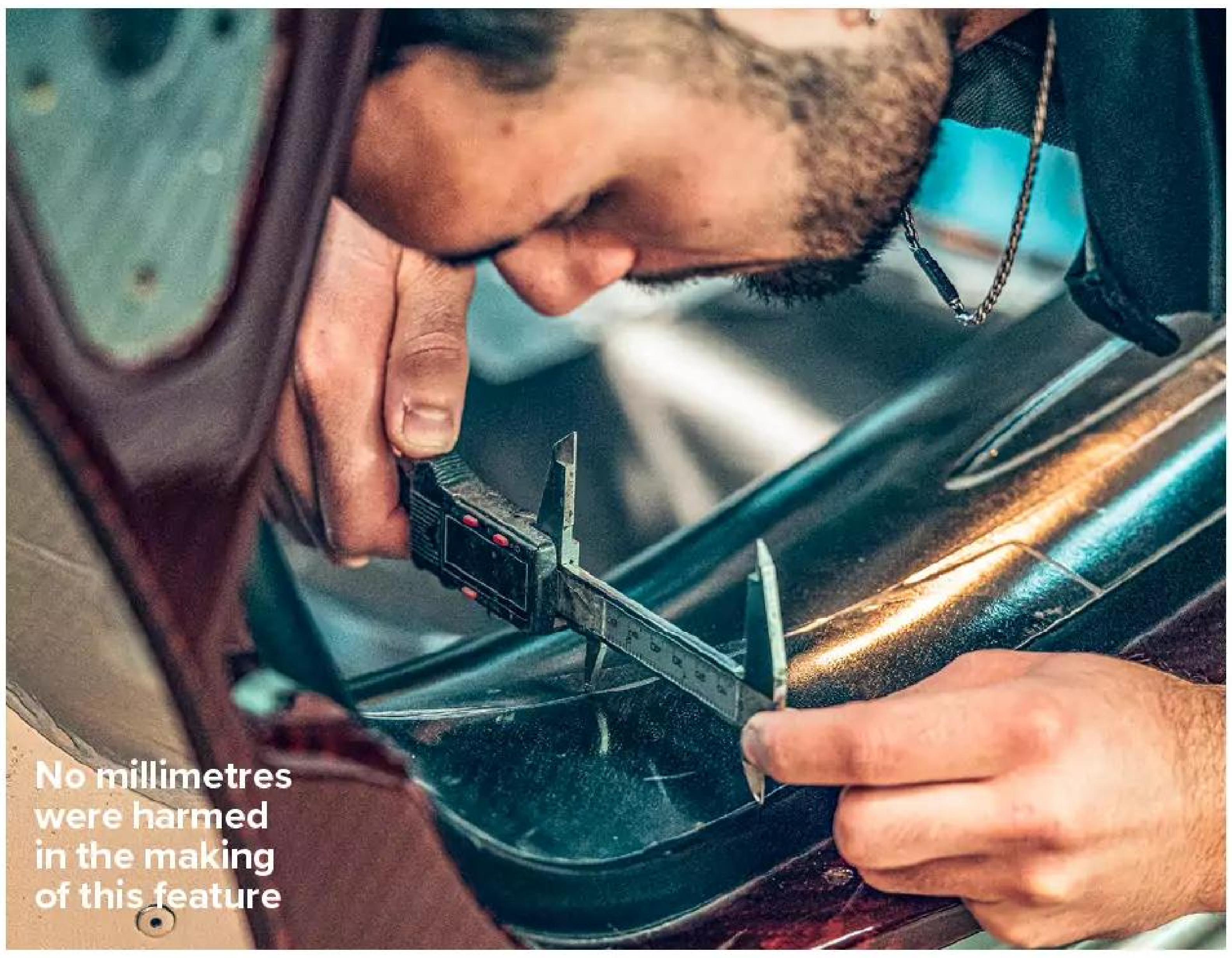
And it feels hand-made – making even something as exquisitely crafted as a Rolls-Royce seem mass-produced. With a Pagani, you don't get the sense that it's spent hour after hour being thrashed on a test rig to iron out any tiny hints of character. The Codalunga thrives on its workshop feel, giving it that precious authenticity. You can sense the humanity that's been poured into it. It's a very special car, but of course it has to use the same roads as the rest of us, and handle the same weather.

At last, the mist starts to lift.

First gear engaged with the right-hand paddle, a definite, two-sound click-clack that requires effort, the titanium spring only yielding when there is a conviction to your finger pull. Instant throttle response from the Pagani V12 – still hand-made by Mercedes-AMG in Germany, but with its own dedicated workforce and enough Pagani touches that the firm feels confident enough to label it as its own.


Art meets engineering in Codalunga gearshift

The Codalunga thrives on its authenticity. You can sense the humanity that's been poured into it


No millimetres were harmed in the making of this feature

For a car whose visual beauty lies in the smoothness of its curves, the Codalunga is surprisingly urgent. There's never any doubting that a 6.0-litre engine is just behind you, the induction noise, turbo whistle and dump valves combining with the baritone of the V12 to give the car a sense of rawness that you don't get from the looks.

There's a sports exhaust button down on the centre console and you'll want to press that every time you get in the car. It doesn't scream like a Zonda of old – blame the switch to forced induction – but there's a purposefulness to the V12 that echoes off these Italian hills. The power delivery is smooth and progressive, with all sorts of fun possible from 2000rpm, turbo whistle and dump-valve chatter giving audible clues and a heightened sense of self-awareness as I minutely flex my right foot. Gravel pings into the wincingly expensive carbon wheelarches.

With Comfort mode engaged, the dampers are surprisingly compliant across bumps, the body and suspension moving in easy harmony. The steering hunts a bit at these low speeds, but the chassis itself is easy to relax into. Francesco Perini, head of Pagani's technical department, tells me they'd had to revise the suspension because of the Codalunga's lower drag.

This could all be construed as making the Codalunga sound like a confusion, a car without a clear sense of identity. But as soon as you stop tip-toeing and start to drive, that changes. Sport mode engaged, dampers stiffened, throttle response sharpened. All of a ▶

Countach model a nod to Horacio's past life

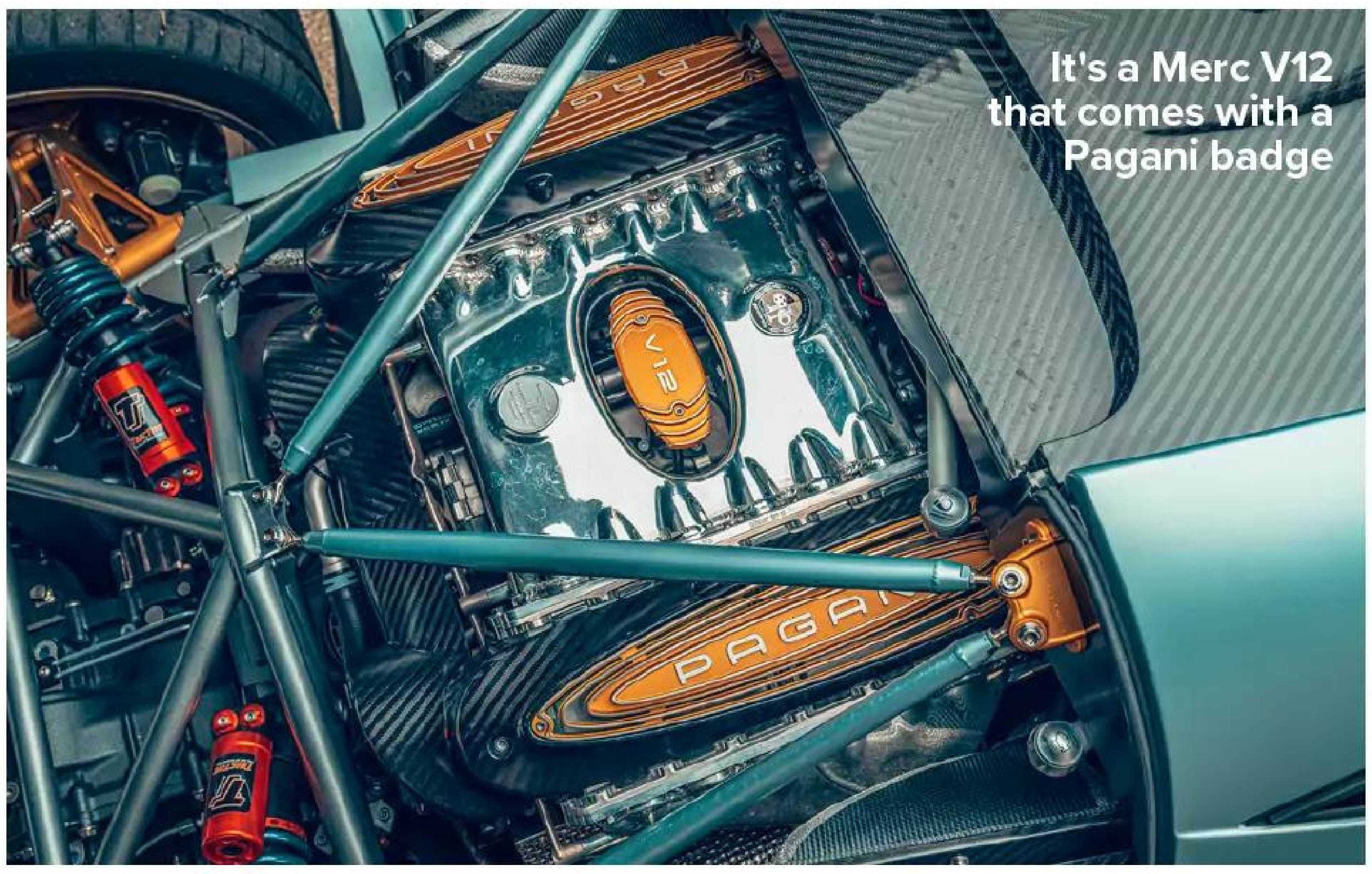
Easy to see where the additional 307mm sits

PAGANI CODALUNGA

PRICE £7,320,000
POWERTRAIN 5980cc 48v twin-turbo V12, seven-speed automated manual, rear-wheel drive
PERFORMANCE 829bhp @ 5900rpm, 811lb ft @ 2000rpm, 3.3sec 0-62mph (est), 217mph
WEIGHT 1280kg (dry)
EFFICIENCY 17.9mpg, 379g/km CO2

THIS STORY ORIGINALLY APPEARED IN THE **MARCH 2024 ISSUE OF *CAR***

The world's most expensive hand-warmer



It's a Merc V12 that comes with a Pagani badge

It piles speed on with a ferocity and determination that shocks

sudden, the previous nervousness to the steering and a tendency to follow the idiosyncrasies of the tarmac iron themselves out. The steering becomes purposeful and direct, slicing through corners with a precision that was missing five minutes ago. It reminds me of a Porsche 962 – a car that was a handful at low speed, but wonderfully controlled once the downforce kicked in.

The car hunkers to the tarmac and fires down the road with a meticulousness that is delicious to feel through the steering and the seat. It lacks the effortless pace of a Bugatti, but whereas in the Molsheim car you feel like you're obliterating the world, in the Codalunga it feels like you're working with it.

The gearbox requires you to engage brain before upshifting, easing the throttle ever so slightly so the cog swap is smoother. It's not as awkward as the transmission in the Ferrari Enzo, but it's not the brain-out dual-clutch effort of so many modern cars. Likewise the speed – it piles on with a ferocity and determination that shocks. Weighing just 1280kg dry, it's no wonder that you have to be respectful of the Codalunga's potential.

Horacio Pagani talks of the 'art of engineering' – it's why there are nods to Leonardo da Vinci around the factory and museum. As Pagani explains, 'It's challenging to think in a different way, having to combine beauty and engineering.' A Pagani will always be about the combination of the looks and the science, a blend that makes you take note whether it's moving or stationary.

It's reassuring that this corner of Italy still exists and continues to have the same consistency of conviction. Even the one-offs and specials like this Codalunga carry the same DNA. The billionaires can sleep easy. **car**

An electric future?

Want to see Horacio Pagani really animated? Get him onto EVs.

He started looking at both 'a potential future all-electric Pagani' and a hybrid in 2018, sensing that a shift in enthusiasts' appetites was imminent. In typical fashion, it wasn't just the car that he looked at, but rather the ecosystem as a whole, a 'smart garage' project.

'No clients were asking for it five years ago. But we have been discussing it with Mercedes and how they see it, as we are always very keen to understand and listen.

'But there is always a *but*, a situation that takes us to the reality. A Pagani hypercar is about 1300kg for a V12 and that is something that's hard to achieve on a fully electric car. If you have to approach similar performance, it will be more than 2500kg, which for us is too much.

'Safety is very important at Pagani. With 1300kg, when you lose the grip, you have a way to re-establish control. With 2500kg, it's a very, very heavy machine to manage. It's like giving a weapon to a client that can create more damage than joy.'

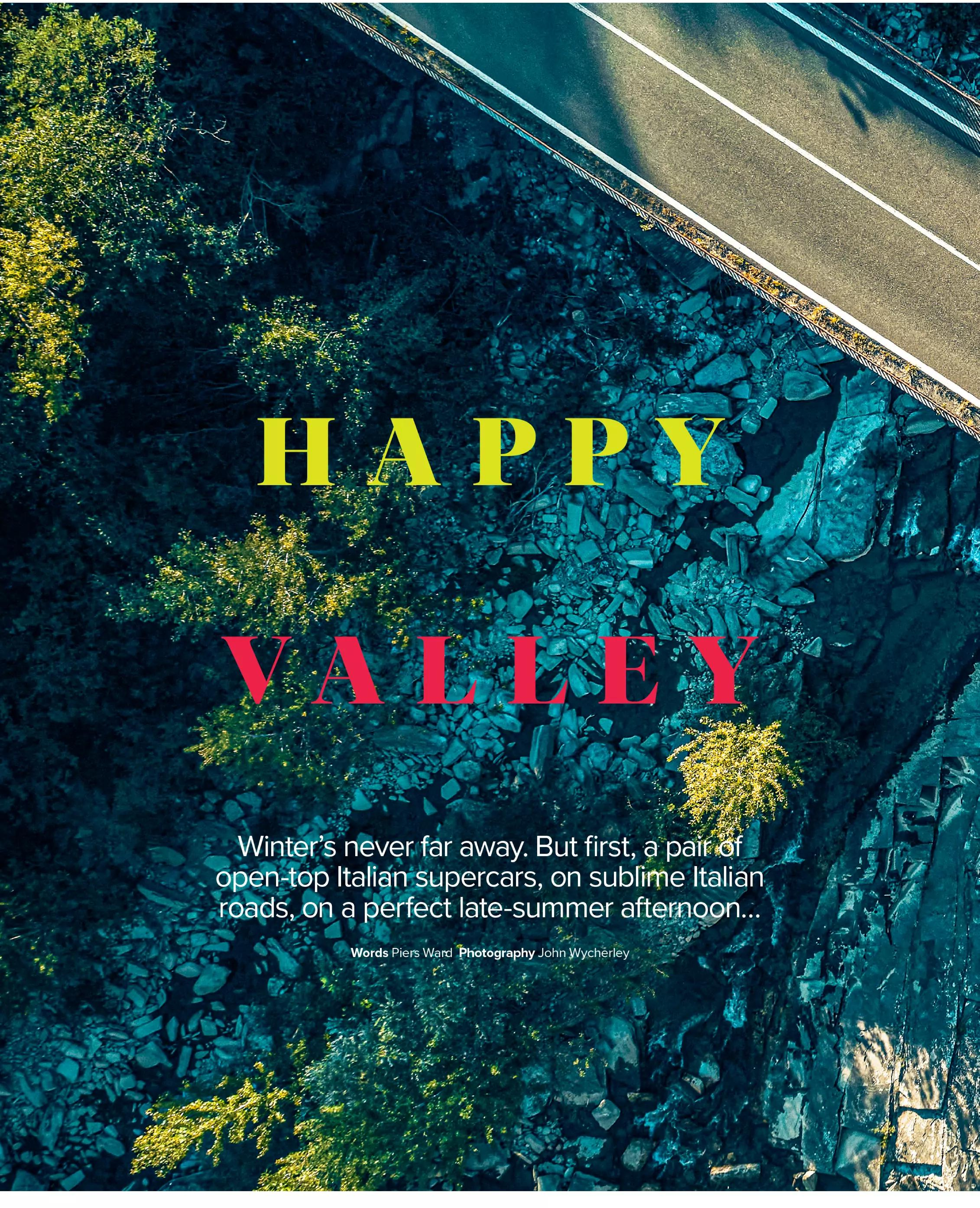
You get the sense there is no rush at Pagani. Plans for the next hypercar, the successor to the Utopia, are already in play but it won't be an EV. 'There is a lot to study and no date for it [electrification] to happen yet.'

Currently, an EV doesn't allow Pagani to maintain the character of his cars. 'You have to feel it when you're driving it. The main goal of these three cars [Zonda, Huayra, Utopia] was to calculate a driver's car. You're the one owning the way it's behaving, deciding what the car is doing.

'This is also related to the weight. When you increase the weight of something, you need the electronics to help you manage the performance so you create an instant filter. We don't believe that creating distance from the driver to the car is something that a Pagani client will appreciate. Why should a Pagani client buy a car that's controlled by electronics? It's stupid – I might as well sell them a simulator.'

Not that he doesn't appreciate what others have done: 'Three brands distinguish themselves due to their remarkable accomplishments in advancing BEV technology. Lotus, Pininfarina and Rimac have put huge efforts into the development of their vehicles so I believe that the work and progress they've achieved will soon be rewarded and recognised.'

If you force Pagani to choose between his Porsche 918 or Carrera GT, he has no doubts. 'I will always take the GT as it's 500kg lighter.'



HAPPY VALLEY

Winter's never far away. But first, a pair of open-top Italian supercars, on sublime Italian roads, on a perfect late-summer afternoon…

Words Piers Ward **Photography** John Wycherley

WWW.FILICORIZECCHINI.IT
FERRARI

It's going to be a long day. Better start it right...

To my left, the wall of rock looming over the Ferrari 296 GTS is made all the more imposing by the view. I can clearly see the monumental height and scale of it towering above the roofless windscreen, steel cables and netting holding the mass in place… hopefully. If there are any weaknesses, our combined exhaust racket will soon expose them.

The V6 in the 296 GTS wails and echoes all around, seemingly forgetting that, with its hybrid assistance, it's meant to be the quiet one. Ahead, the Maserati MC20 Cielo, similarly V6-powered, contributes its own bass notes, growling menacingly at the Ferrari in a supercar equivalent of the *The X Factor*.

The sun glances off the very upper tip of the rock wall, lighting the uppermost reaches but leaving us plunged in the murk below. The red of the Ferrari paintwork and the acid yellow highlights of the Maserati ping in the gloom, like someone has layered an Instagram filter onto this extraordinary day.

The road twists and turns, just wide enough for us to thread our way through but without the ultimate visibility to pick an optimal line. Ahead, the Maserati is earlier on the brakes, unsure of exactly what lies ahead. I can use the MC20's line and follow at a more confident lick. These are scenic, armco-lined roads, but they're not for the faint-hearted.

We park up for a breather, cars ticking in the sunshine and with a sense that the valley is resettling itself after the aural and visual battering it's just received. Right now is as good as 2023 will get. It's a day that's largely about celebrating similarities – V6-engined droptop supercars from Italian companies rich in heritage – but it began with a contrast. Because while Maserati has, in recent decades, been guilty of a low or two in among the highs, Ferrari has been on a run of form to make Max Verstappen green with envy. The factories' home towns reflect that. Modena gets splashes of the Maserati Trident, but in Maranello Ferrari is the only game in town, dominating every business in the vicinity.

The MC20 has been widely acclaimed as a standout car for Maserati, set against the backdrop of a new corporate structure (part of Stellantis; no longer the awkward Ferrari sibling) and created in a rapid development programme (the coupe took just 20 months). The Cielo droptop uses a carbon tub similar to the coupe's, with only the distribution of the carbonfibre and its layers changing between the two. In the Cielo, more emphasis is placed on torsional stiffness, while the coupe aims for low weight. Still, the Cielo is 65kg heavier than its sibling.

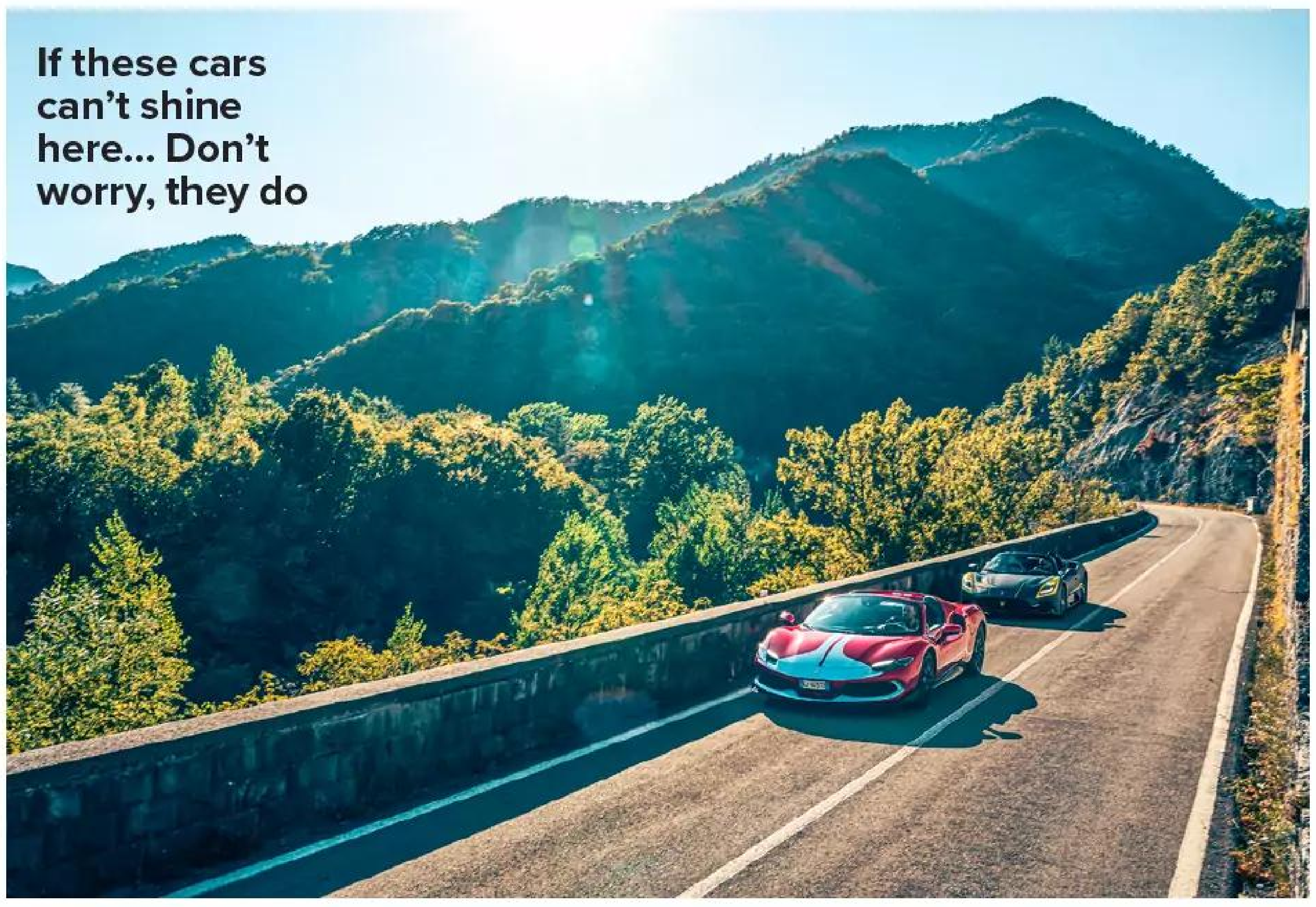
Nestled in the middle of that tub is the 3.0-litre Nettuno V6 that can, with a small fee to Ancestry, trace its roots to Alfa's Romeo Giulia Quadrifoglio and Maserati's GranTurismo Trofeo. It produces the same amount of power as in the MC20 coupe, but the droptop is a fraction slower to 62mph.

Gianluca di Oto, model chief engineer on the MC20, tells me that when they were testing the engine, they had to make significant adjustments to the torque curve because in the early days it came in with far too much aggression: 'It was like an old Ducati.' When the car produces 538lb ft and 621bhp, you can understand why softly-softly was a sound objective.

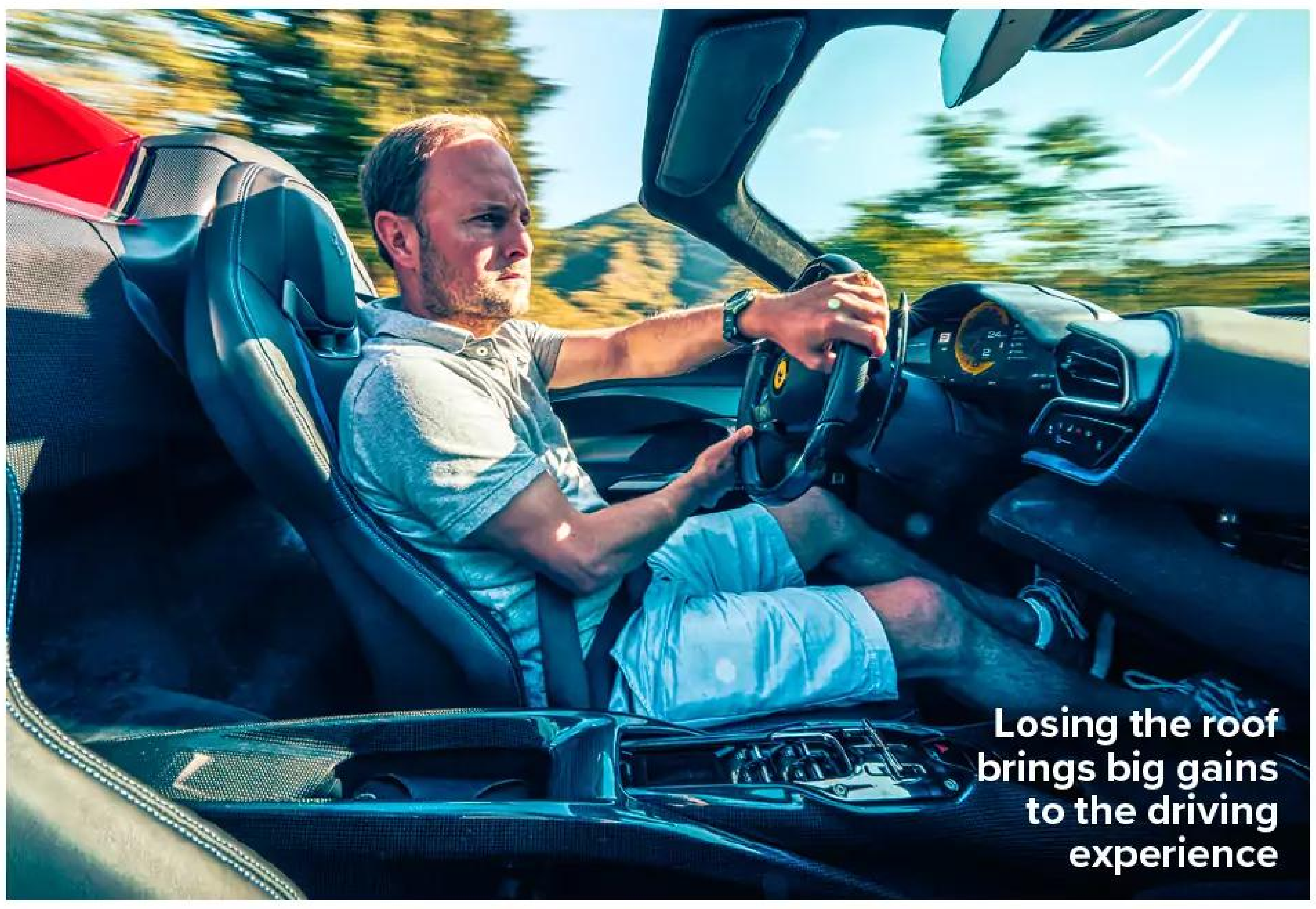
Especially as the brand wants this to be the GT of the drop-top supercars, with adjustable dampers across four settings. It's also why it went for the statement butterfly doors, as they give easier access to the cabin. It's a supercar, but one that's meant to be easy to live with. Even the nose lift is standard.

The retractable roof folds quickly, and does so at speeds of up to 30mph so you don't look like a berk when the traffic moves off at the lights and you're mid-close. It's operated by a sub-menu in the 10.25-inch touchscreen – don't worry, this one is intuitive to use. The cabin remains light and airy even with the roof closed, thanks to the translucent panel of glass in the roof. Customers living in hotter climes needn't worry about it turning into a £250k greenhouse – the panel can be made opaque with a press of a button.

Roof down, sunglasses on, we head out of Modena for the 30-minute trip to Maranello. It's immediately clear this is a Maserati in ▶



If these cars can't shine here... Don't worry, they do



Losing the roof brings big gains to the driving experience

Challenging corners, camber changes and hairpins lie in wait to test the cars' abilities

Calmer colours are available. Still, in for a penny…

A journey in this part of the world in locally produced supercars is always an event

which to gleefully swallow miles. Even the fixed-back seats (our Cielo is fitted with carbonfibre buckets, saving 18kg, optional at £5900) can be tilted to give more under-thigh support.

Ferrari time. If you're still not convinced about the all-consuming nature of the Ferrari brand, I draw your attention to the bracing plates on the security fencing around the factory. Few people ever see them and yet even they have a Ferrari logo stamped on them. You get the feeling that if a local cat falls asleep in the sun, it'll be branded with a prancing horse.

The 296 is arguably the Ferrari of the moment, despite stiff competition from the Purosangue and the Roma Spider. Mid-engined like the Maserati, the 296 GTS goes for an aluminium spaceframe rather than a carbon tub. Ferrari resolutely sticks to its tried-and-tested method, reserving carbonfibre for flagships like the LaFerrari. Plus, painful though it is to think about it, aluminium is much easier to repair.

It's worth dwelling a while on the hybrid V6 engine. The 120° layout was, until the dawn of the hybrid age, rarely used because of its width. But that width makes room between the cylinder banks for the turbos, the 'hot vee' bringing better turbo efficiency. The engine produces 654bhp, and when combined with the 120bhp axial motor the system output smashes the Maserati's peak by almost 200bhp. The Ferrari can even manage 15 electric-only miles.

It's because of that electric ability that we're met with our first glum face of the day. Maranello is swamped with tourists, and one kid thinks he's lucked out by hanging around near the museum where we're stationed. Phone poised, he waits expectantly as we clamber aboard and prod the starter buttons. Silently, the Ferrari pulls away and his phone arm droops. The Maserati V6 obliges and he seems happier.

The crawl at the start of our journey towards the Futa Pass is frustrating. But as soon as we hit the SS65 towards Firenzuola, the tarmac and topography begin to come alive. Tree-lined roads sweep along hillsides with challenging corner following quickly after challenging corner, with camber changes and hairpins lying in wait to test the cars' abilities.

A journey in this part of the world in locally produced supercars always becomes an event thanks to the reaction of the locals, who never tire of seeing Ferraris and Maseratis. Even here, it's not often you see a Maserati and a Ferrari in convoy, so arms are waving encouragement in just about every village we pass through. Both cars receive equal amounts of clamour. The Ferrari has the party trick of silent running through villages, but beware when the engine eventually fires – it comes in with such a sudden *whaarp* that my heart is still not back down to its resting rate. The audience love it, though.

Out of town, if you want to stop it switching to electric you just flick into Performance mode using the button on the left of the steering wheel. Not only does this help charge the battery, giving scope for longer silent running later in built-up areas, but it also makes the throttle response more predictable. The Ferrari is superbly intuitive in almost all instances, with the sort of steering that only requires a gentle puff of breath to make the car react just as you want it to. But the way the powertrain alternates between electric and combustion in Hybrid mode can make it difficult to judge exactly how the 296 is going to respond. Performance mode gives a ▶

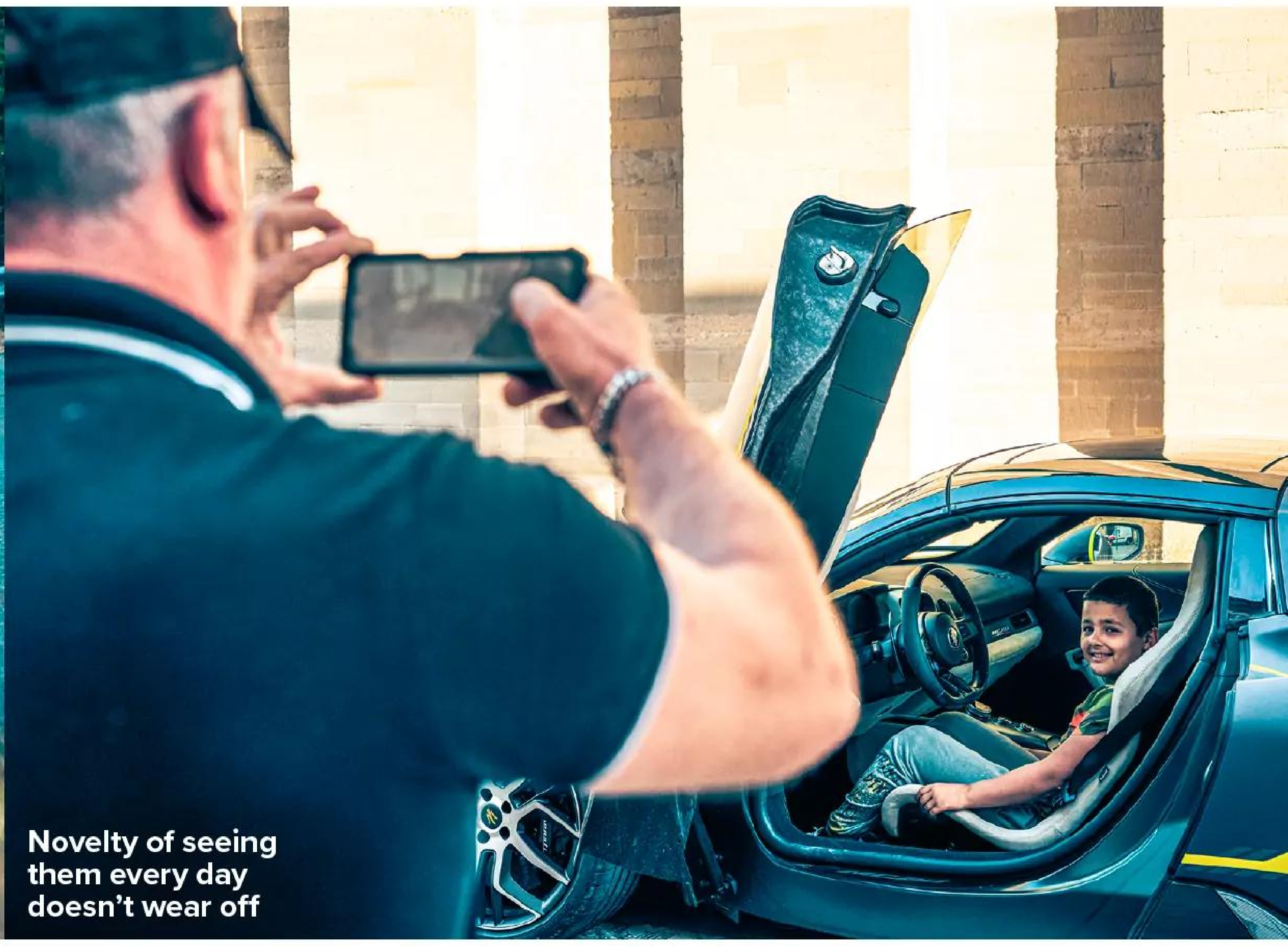
A bit more wiring. No, not a Prius

Ferrari quicker, but not by much

Simpler and more intuitive than the 296

Best not ask, really

It's late summer. That bone-dry smell born of weeks of arid conditions whips into the cabin



Novelty of seeing them every day doesn't wear off

That steering wheel is busy, in both senses

Carbon tub happy to lose its lid

consistent pedal feel and resistance, with a more natural heft to the throttle. It means you can balance the car with a greater degree of certainty, vital through these twisty roads of northern Italy.

The 296 also suffers for cramming everything onto the steering wheel. It's a solution to a problem that never really existed, and it means the Ferrari takes a bit of getting used to. The touch-sensitive pads are the main guilty party, being painfully awkward to operate and leaving me helplessly stirring my finger around them like a child hunting for the last bit of Nutella at the bottom of the jar.

Worse, they're also distracting, as you must take your eyes off the road to know where the cursor has got to. The car's entire battery of information and control lives in those two places – the dash and the wheel – so you need to familiarise yourself with how they work.

Maserati has gone more conventional. The steering wheel still has buttons on it, but not quite the F1-like 296 set-up, and the touchscreen is simple. Down on the central tunnel is the drive mode selector – a rotational dial that cycles through GT (default on start-up), Sport, Corsa and ESC Off.

We've reached Firenzuola and it's late in the evening before I get a chance to head off in the MC20. Nose pointed south towards the Futa Pass, we start off in GT mode. The suspension is in its softest setting, which you can tweak with a simple swipe, but this mode is not for the unique twists of the Futa. The engine sounds throaty but the response from the turbo isn't direct and the steering doesn't have the Ferrari's precision.

The return journey in Sport is where the Maserati starts to up its game. Even though the road is narrow in places (no wonder Ducati uses it as a test route), the car becomes much easier to place into an apex with the car in Sport and everything dialled in.

In GT, the soft suspension means the nose porpoises on the way into corners, but once you switch to Sport and put the suspension in 'mid', the float is gone and the car feels more planted. Equally, the throttle response, turbo and steering are all sharper, while the brakes, now warm and requiring less of a racing driver's hard stamp, are beautifully judged.

With the roof down, this is sensory overload. It's late summer. That bone-dry smell born of weeks of arid conditions whips into the cabin. A day that started with contrasts ends with them – the dying sun softening the edges of the landscape in stark contrast to the Sport-sharpened responses of the MC20. You sense that the local wildlife is settling down for the night – until the Cielo's V6 barks everything awake again.

296 can go silent in town; MC20 not so much

The MC20's compromise between comfort and tautness is spot-on

In Sport, the car feels more dialled in as the roads goes from corner to corner, left to right and back again over endless little crests and dips. The compromise between comfort and tautness is spot on.

Driving back into Firenzuola, you swiftly realise that the Ferrari would be the more sociable car at this hour; even back in GT and in auto, the MC20's V6 echoes against the old Italian stone buildings. Still, parked up and hot metal ticking, nobody seems to mind. I'm not so sure they feel the same when the V6 goes off at 6am the next morning, acting as the world's most extreme alarm clock.

I'm back in the Ferrari for this morning's drive and feeling right ▶

BEST OF ENEMIES

Rivals on track
Given their geographical proximity, it's no great surprise that Maserati and Ferrari have oscillated between the extremes of corporate pals and mortal foes over the years.

In the early days of the F1 World Championship, the rivalry spurred both on: Ferrari won in 1952 and '53, Maserati in 1954 and '57 (pictured). When Maserati quit works motorsport that year, some of the wind went out of F1's sails.

Shared tech? Who's asking?
Ferrari assumed full control of Maserati in 1999 and dialled up the luxury. The pairing made sense given Maserati's history in GT cars and Ferrari's in sports cars, although Maserati was always keener to talk about the link than Ferrari. The MC12 (race version pictured) was Enzo-based, while the 2007 GranTurismo used a Ferrari-derived V8.

Corporate future
Now back with Fiat as part of Stellantis, Maserati has the stability to build on its status. It's gone back to motorsport, in both Formula E (pictured) and GT racing, and the product strategy is sound, with plenty of variety including bankable SUVs. Could we finally be entering a new golden age? You can bet the wildly successful neighbours will be watching.

Roofs go up with minimal effort

Supercar meets GT meets cabrio

> **In this era of Peak Engine, both reach heights few cars have ever achieved**

at home in the driver's seat. Unlike the MC20, you don't need to fiddle with settings to get the 296 just right, even if the *manettino* does let you tweak the suspension, gearbox and traction control.

The steering is something else – some criticise Maranello's set-up for being too whip-fast, but I don't find that. The 296 invites you to hold it lightly, with palms and fingers there to guide rather than wrestle, and it naturally follows your brain and line of sight. It's a wonderfully and weirdly calm way to enjoy something with over 800bhp through just two driven wheels.

It's also merely a precursor to the rest of the excellent chassis. The rotation about the mid-point is the highlight for me – balancing the car on a trailing brake into the apex is an absolute joy. And all this at legal road speeds. Just like the very best Porsche GT cars, the 296 rewards at all speeds.

The roads this morning are heavily tree-lined, so your view ahead isn't what it would be over the Welsh hills, but the GTS is a beautiful car to thread through a series of corners along the bottom of a valley. Grip levels are outstanding and here the body control feels tighter than on the Maserati. In the MC20, the damping controls the wheel movement well but can't quite keep the body in check. The Ferrari trades slightly firmer wheel control for just the right level of body movement. It's not stiff like a Porsche 911 GT3 RS, so has a bit more flex, which is something I'd want from my road car. It makes the 296 more approachable.

And approach they do. Firenzuola is abuzz with people wanting to have a look, not least one child who looks extremely likely to make himself late for school as he cycles around trying to keep up with us. His reward is a brief sit in the MC20 before we leave town and begin the journey back to the factories.

Choosing between these two feels as mind-bendingly difficult as choosing between *Breaking Bad* or *The Sopranos*. The two rivals are both so brilliant, albeit with many differences. In this era of Peak Engine, they both reach heights few cars have ever achieved.

Is either compromised in any way by losing its roof? Not at all. It's the first time I can remember driving a droptop where I'd genuinely consider it over its coupe sibling, for the extra sensations it brings.

In terms of out-and-out handling ability, the Ferrari takes some beating no matter the rival. The way it feels instantly correct and rewarding at all speeds is quite something. Crucially, it's not a surface-deep car – the Ferrari will keep on revealing hidden depths and talents long after the PDI polish has worn off. It's already one of the cars of the decade, and for Maserati to even get on the same page is an incredible achievement – especially when you think the MC20 was developed in such a short timeframe.

The Cielo's trump card is its comfort. Maserati claims it aimed for the GT end of the supercar market when it developed the car and it has absolutely delivered. It doesn't have the fingertip control of the Ferrari but if you're not driving at ten-tenths, that won't matter. It's why the MC20 is such a fascinating rival to the Ferrari, giving it a duality of purpose across comfort and sport that adds an extra layer of interest. The Maserati renaissance continues. **car**

THE RIVALS

McLaren 750S Spider

This or the Artura? If you're desperate, right now, for a wind-in-the-hair supercar from a British brand, then the 740bhp 750S it will have to be – it's available to order now, while the droptop version of the hybrid Artura doesn't yet officially exist...

Lamborghini Huracan Evo Spyder

Ageing Italian soon to be replaced. But unlike the MC20 or the 296 it's naturally aspirated. And a V10 to boot. Lacks the finesse of the others, but for aural drama few can match it...

Aston Martin Vantage Roadster

...except possibly this. Available in two flavours – 503bhp V8 and 690bhp V12 – the one to get is the F1 Edition V8 Roadster, with power up to 527bhp, because of its sharper handling and responses. Try to ignore the dated interior, though.

THIS
STORY
ORIGINALLY
APPEARED IN THE
**NOVEMBER
2023 ISSUE
OF *CAR***

FERRARI 296 GTS ASSETTO FIORANO

PRICE £279,307
POWERTRAIN 7.45kWh battery, 2992cc 24v twin-turbo V6 plus e-motor, PHEV, eight-speed dual-clutch auto, rear-wheel drive
PERFORMANCE 819bhp @ 8000rpm, 546lb ft @ 6250rpm, 2.9sec 0-62mph, 205mph
WEIGHT 1540kg (dry)
EFFICIENCY 16.3-26.7mpg, 205-348g/km CO2
★★★★★

MASERATI MC20 CIELO

PRICE £245,260
POWERTRAIN 2992cc 24v twin-turbo V6, eight-speed dual-clutch auto, rear-wheel drive
PERFORMANCE 621bhp @ 7500rpm, 538lb ft @ 3000rpm, 3.0sec 0-62mph, 199mph
WEIGHT 1540kg
EFFICIENCY 24.1mpg, 265g/km CO2
★★★★★

ENJOYING CAR?

SUBSCRIBE AND NEVER MISS AN ISSUE

SAVE ON SHOP PRICES

CHOOSE A SUBSCRIPTION TO SUIT YOU:

greatmagazines.co.uk/car

01858 438 884

SCAN HERE

Terms & Conditions: Subscriptions will start with the next available issue. Offers cannot be used in conjunction with any other offer. Trial offers are only available on recurring payment and will auto-renew after the initial trial. If you wish to cancel before the end of your trial period, please notify customer services at least 10 days before the end of your trial. Should the next payment have already been taken by the time you cancel, please contact us as soon as possible to arrange a refund. Any subsequent payments are non-refundable, and any cancellations will be from the next payment date. Order line open 0800hrs – 2100hrs (Mon-Fri). 1000hrs – 1600hrs (Sat). Calls may be monitored or recorded for training purposes. Call costs from mobiles vary according to the calling plan chosen. Typically, they are included in free call packages. However, if you call an 01/02 number outside of any inclusive minutes, they can cost between 3p and 65p per minute. Calls from landlines to 01 numbers are typically charged up to 16p per minute. Many providers charge a 23p call set-up fee (or 'connection charge'), but this can vary. Please refer to ofcom.org.uk for updated pricing. Costs for calls from overseas vary depending on the location. For general terms and conditions please visit: www.greatmagazines.co.uk/offer-terms-and-conditions